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PHILADELPHIA'S CONVENTION HALL IN CONTEXT

Sarah Elisabeth Zurier

A THESIS

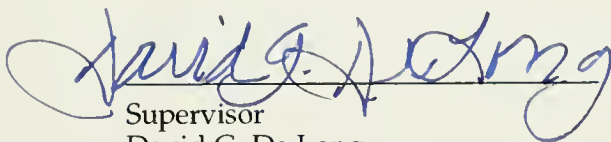
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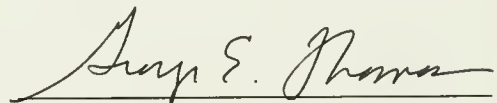
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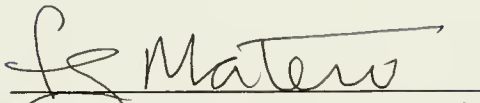
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Supervisor
David G. De Long
Professor of Architecture



Reader
George E. Thomas
Lecturer, Historic Preservation



Graduate Group Chair
Frank G. Matero
Associate Professor of Architecture

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In years to come children will say, "Father, were you in the big war?"
and father will say, "No, son, but I went through the New York convention."
—Will Rogers, reporting from the 1924 Democratic National Convention

We do tend to associate the architecture of a given age with certain totems of extent.
After all, one of building's constants is the old struggle with gravity.
The Coliseum stands in for Rome, soaring, vaulted cathedral naves summarize the
Middle Ages, the 19th century is repped by railway sheds and crystal palaces. . .
As for us, we have skyscrapers, the Vertical Assembly Building at Canaveral,
Portman atria, and convention centers.
—Michael Sorkin, *Exquisite Corpse: Writing on Buildings*

*To the memory of my maternal grandparents,
Albert Rosen and Helen Greenfield Rosen,
both born and raised in Philadelphia
during the first quarter of the twentieth century,
give or take a few years*

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Acknowledgments

When my friend asked me the topic of my thesis, I replied, "Convention Hall. You know—here in West Philly, across the street from the Hospital." "Oh," she said, "You mean that huge building that nobody sees."

She was right. I had biked back and forth over the Schuylkill River bridges for about a year before I really saw Convention Hall and the Philadelphia Civic Center. I was looking for a thesis topic concerning public architecture of the 1930s. I found not only a public building, but also a public building type, as well as a unique museum.

Before undertaking this project, I was concerned about being able to see the inside of the buildings, too. Richard Tyler of the Philadelphia Historical Commission put me in touch with Linda Bantel and Georgiana Grentzenberg, who are overseeing the care of the Civic Center Museum's collections during this transitional phase. They got me inside the Civic Center buildings and introduced me to Warren and Frank Dombrowski of the maintenance department. Warren and Frank showed me around the site, turned on lights, and loaned me a walkie-talkie in case I got lost.

The staffs at the University of Pennsylvania Libraries, the Urban Archives at Temple University, the Free Library of Philadelphia, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the German Society of Pennsylvania, and the Philadelphia City Archives have been very considerate. David Brownlee helped me piece together the information regarding the competition for a Victory Hall on the Parkway. Sharon Pinkenson of the Philadelphia Film Commission shared her thoughts on a creative adaptive re-use of the Philadelphia Civic Center.

I am grateful to all the people who helped see this thesis to its final form. My parents provided an incentive by promising to bring my niece Rachel to graduation. Jonathan Bell speeded down from Princeton to scan images, lay out the picture pages, and serve as graphics guru. Calista Cleary not only edited drafts and helped me tighten up the thesis, but she also enjoyed hanging out and talking about 1920s Philadelphia. As the official reader, George Thomas returned comments with lightening speed, shared his knowledge of all things Philadelphia, and helped me link this history with contemporary political and architectural developments.

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Contents

<i>List of figures</i>		v
<i>Introduction</i>		1
<i>Chapter 1</i>	<i>An Ongoing World's Fair: The Commercial Museum</i>	11
	<i>A legacy of the fair 11</i>	
	<i>The Commercial Museum 12</i>	
	<i>The National Export Exposition 18</i>	
	<i>A new institution 22</i>	
<i>Chapter 2</i>	<i>A "great place where the whole citizenship of Philadelphia could assemble": Visions of a Convention Hall</i>	32
	<i>White City revisited 32</i>	
	<i>City corrupt, contented, and beautiful 33</i>	
	<i>Old Convention Hall 43</i>	
	<i>Schemes for a permanent convention hall 47</i>	
	<i>More schemes for a permanent convention hall 51</i>	
<i>Chapter 3</i>	<i>A "great coliseum of the twentieth century": Philadelphia's Convention Hall</i>	66
	<i>A public celebration 66</i>	
	<i>New commitments to old ideas 68</i>	
	<i>Architect and design 73</i>	
	<i>Construction and completion 79</i>	
	<i>At the new Convention Hall 82</i>	
<i>Conclusion</i>		93
<i>Figures</i>		104
<i>Bibliography</i>		134
<i>Index</i>		145

List of figures

<i>fig. 1</i>	Edward Hicks, <i>Peaceable Kingdom With Rhymed Borders</i> , 1826	100
<i>fig. 2</i>	The Chinese Museum, 1853	101
<i>fig. 3</i>	Gardeners' Exhibition at the Chinese Museum, 1853	101
<i>fig. 4</i>	Republican National Convention, Academy of Music, 1872	102
<i>fig. 5</i>	Machinery Exhibition and Sales Room, Philadelphia Bourse, ca. 1900	103
<i>fig. 6</i>	Commercial Museum, 233 S. 4th Street, ca. 1899	104
<i>fig. 7</i>	Commercial Museum: Exhibit of fibers from Mexico, ca. 189	104
<i>fig. 8</i>	<i>Plan of Grounds and Buildings, National Export Exposition, Philadelphia, 1899</i>	105
<i>fig. 9</i>	Wilson Brothers and Hewitt Brothers, Main Building, National Export Exposition, 1899	106
<i>fig. 10</i>	Republican National Convention, National Export Exposition Auditorium, 1900	106
<i>fig. 11</i>	Wilson Brothers, Hewitt Brothers, and Brockie and Hastings, North Building, Commercial Museum, ca. 1907	107
<i>fig. 12</i>	Reading Room and Library, Commercial Museum, ca. 1907	107
<i>fig. 13</i>	Students at a gallery lecture, Commercial Museum, ca. 1908	108
<i>fig. 14</i>	Automobile Show in Center Building, Commercial Museum, 1906	108
<i>fig. 15</i>	Sites Considered for a Municipal Convention Hall and/or Victory Hall, Philadelphia, pre-1909—1929 (table)	109-10
<i>fig. 16</i>	Sites Considered for a Municipal Convention Hall and/or Victory Hall, Philadelphia, pre-1909—1929 (map)	111
<i>fig. 17</i>	Ballinger and Perrot, Convention Hall. First floor plan, 1910	112
<i>fig. 18</i>	John Windrim?, <i>Grand Assembly Centre and its Relation to the Parkway</i> . Plan, 1911	113
<i>fig. 19</i>	John Windrim, Grand Assembly Centre. Bird's-eye perspective, 1911	114
<i>fig. 20</i>	Carl Berger, Temporary Convention Hall, 1912. Photograph of exterior, 1914	115

fig. 21	Temporary Convention Hall, 1912. Photograph of interior, 1912	115
fig. 22	John Windrim, Convention Hall. Perspective, 1916	116
fig. 23	John Windrim, Convention Hall. Perspective, 1917	116
fig. 24	J. Harold MacDowell, Public Auditorium, 1922. Perspective, 1922	117
fig. 25	DeMar, "\$2300 A SEAT!" 1924	117
fig. 26	Paul Cret, Victory Hall. Perspective, 1925	118
fig. 27	John Molitor, Convention Hall. Elevation, 1926	118
fig. 28	Auditorium Building, Sesqui-Centennial Grounds, 1926	118
fig. 29	Cover of <i>The Philadelphia Municipal Auditorium</i> (souvenir booklet), 1931	119
fig. 30	Philip H. Johnson, Municipal Auditorium, 1929-31. West elevation, 1929	120
fig. 31	J. Harold MacDowell, Public Auditorium, 1922. Elevation, ca. 1917	120
fig. 32	Municipal Auditorium. Cut-away perspective. 1931	121
fig. 33	Philip H. Johnson, Municipal Auditorium, 1929-31. West elevation, 1929	122
fig. 34	Lockwood, Greene, & Co., Atlantic City Convention Hall, 1926-27. Photograph, 1929	122
fig. 35	Philip H. Johnson, Municipal Auditorium, 1929-31. North elevation, 1929	123
fig. 36	Frieze and panel details, Municipal Auditorium, 1931	123
fig. 37	American Medical Association convention in auditorium of Municipal Auditorium, 1931	124
fig. 38	U.S. Navy Band concert at Municipal Auditorium, 1931	124
fig. 39	Electrical Trade Show at Municipal Auditorium, 1933	125
fig. 40	Democratic National Convention at Municipal Auditorium, 1936	126
fig. 41	Democratic National Convention at Municipal Auditorium (interior), 1936	126
fig. 42	Municipal Convention Halls, Public Auditoriums, Veterans'	127

Auditoriums, Market-Auditoriums, etc., 1910s-1930s

<i>fig. 43</i>	National Tube Company, "Preferred For Public Buildings" (advertisement), 1934	128
<i>fig. 44</i>	Philadelphia Civic Center, 1996	129
<i>fig. 45</i>	Municipal Auditorium lobby, 1931	129

Introduction

In one of his 1826 paintings of the *Peaceable Kingdom*, self-taught artist Edward Hicks (1786-1849) depicted the first convention in the royal colony of Pennsylvania: the fabled 1682 encounter between William Penn, his representatives, and the Lenni Lenape Indians (*fig. 1*). In fact, the painting portrayed two simultaneous meetings on the banks of the Delaware at Shackamaxon, now the Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia. Penn mediates between “savage” Indians and “civilized” Englishmen in the background, and the child mediates between wild and domesticated beasts in the foreground. While no historical account of such a meeting between Penn and members of the Lenni Lenape tribe survives, this pseudo-event has taken on a life of its own through its portrayal in an abundance of literary and artistic sources. It has emerged as a favorite event in Pennsylvania’s popular history by serving as a benevolent origin myth. Evidently, Penn’s treaty proved popular with Hicks’s audience, for he depicted the meeting time and time again. Hicks also authored several paintings that portrayed another favorite convention: the 1776 signing of the Declaration of Independence at the Pennsylvania State House (now Independence Hall) in Philadelphia.

One could argue that Philadelphia’s role in national affairs has been predicated on such events as Penn’s legendary encounter with the Lenni Lenape, the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the 1787 Constitutional Convention, and the 1997 Presidents’ Summit for America’s Future.¹ Throughout its history, Philadelphia has presented itself as a common meeting ground for the larger country, notably providing the first location for the nation’s capitol and serving as the host city for the 1876 Centennial Exhibition just over a decade after the country’s divisive Civil War ended. In promoting Philadelphia as the “ideal Historic Convention City”

in 1916, the Chamber of Commerce referred back to the city's role as a meeting place so as to link the hallowed Constitutional Convention ("America's First Convention") with any large-scale gathering that might come to Philadelphia for their dog show, club dinner-dance, or commencement ceremony.² And in 1996, publicity generated by the Pennsylvania Convention Center claims, "Since the birth of our nation, Philadelphia has hosted countless conventions and gatherings. . . .The Pennsylvania Convention Center will continue to carry on a 200-year plus tradition of welcoming people to Philadelphia."³

Is it appropriate to describe all of these events as conventions? The English word "convention" derives from the Latin verb *convenire*, to assemble. On the one hand, the preceding historic examples relate to the definitions of the convention as a formal meeting of members, representatives, or delegates of a particular interest group; the body of persons attending such an assembly; or an agreement between parties—such as the treaty lying at Penn's feet in the Hicks painting. Convention can also be defined as a general agreement on or acceptance of certain practices or attitudes; a practice or procedure widely observed in a group; or a widely used and accepted device or technique. For example, Hicks made use of artistic "conventions," such as Penn's outstretched arms to convey agreement between two parties as well as the pairing of carnivores with their prey to convey peace.

All of these meanings demonstrate that a convention relies on people's ability to identify, think, and/or act as a group. Assembly is not limited to the physical but also can occur as a social, intellectual, cultural, political, or other consensus. Notably, all of these definitions give precedence to actors and their actions but offer little information about the space in which a convention occurs. Is physical assembly (quorum) itself enough to describe the space occupied by a convention?

Even in the sylvan landscape of the *Peaceable Kingdom*, there are two symbolic representations of physical structure. The child holds a tree branch, which refers to the elm tree around which Hicks has gathered Penn's group. Not only did "the elm trees [*sic*] shade" provide a cool canopy above the group's heads; it also marked a location for the event at hand. In the sparsely settled American colonies of the 17th century, prominent trees like Penn's shady elm and Connecticut's Charter Oak signified shelter, stability, and sense of place. In fact, the latter tree physically embodied the colonial charter by providing the document with a safe hiding place within its massive trunk.

As more Europeans arrived in the American colonies, they adapted old world ideas of settlement to new world conditions. In addition to their private dwellings and farms, they created communal spaces. In the northern colonies, these included open areas like town greens and common grazing lands as well as public structures like meetinghouses, churches, and marketplaces.⁴ In the 18th century, growing financial resources and an increasing sense of stability encouraged Philadelphians to construct imposing structures like Christ Church, the State House, and Carpenter's Hall. These buildings housed specific types of assembly—religious, political, professional, respectively—that relied on significant local attendance. Such buildings primarily served their direct constituencies, but might have occasionally offered a convenient location for the convening of a particular interest group like members of the First Continental Congress or delegates to the Constitutional Convention.⁵

Philadelphia's rapid industrial and commercial development propelled it into the ranks of world class cities in the 19th century. The booming metropolis required more specialized institutions to serve the needs of its diverse population, especially its expanding middle class. Government-sponsored public architecture included schools, courthouses, and libraries. Specific interest groups erected their own

gathering places like churches, clubhouses, private libraries, fraternal halls, and union halls. Private entrepreneurs constructed an infrastructure for Philadelphia's public culture that included theatres, museums, music halls, industrial halls, and athletic facilities.⁶

The same period witnessed the emergence of new events and activities that required the occasional use of large-scale space in a central location. In 1831, the major political parties began to hold national conventions to nominate their candidates for president and vice-president. By the late 19th century, professional and trades organizations were organizing periodic membership meetings at state and national levels. Industrialists and manufacturers sponsored exhibitions or participated in special events from county fairs to international expositions in order to display their latest products to the public. Additionally, the growing leisure movement was encouraging increasing numbers of citizens to participate in, or at least attend, local events like flower shows, dog shows, art exhibitions, and the like. These types of events relied on mass communication for publicity and on growing railroad networks for the transport of participants, equipment, and goods.⁷

But save for the versatile Chinese Museum, and to a lesser extent the Academy of Music, Philadelphia's existing building stock largely lacked the dedicated facility that could accommodate a constantly changing schedule of conventions, exhibitions, and events. The former building was constructed in 1838 with galleries for the Peale collection of art and natural science on the second floor and a hall housing wax figures in Chinese costume on the first floor (*figs. 2-3*). Philadelphia chroniclers Scharf and Westcott explain that when the exhibits were dismantled in the 1840s, the Chinese Museum was "thrown open for use for balls, concerts, public meetings, exhibitions, etc."⁸ The arcaded upper floor held 5000-6000 standees and the lower floor accommodated another 3000-4000. The Chinese Museum's finest hour

arrived in 1847, when Whig Party delegates convened there to nominate Zachary Taylor for President. The building burnt to the ground in 1854, but the following year, workers broke ground for the Academy of Music (*fig. 4*). Although intended for use as an opera house, the latter building also hosted such occasions as national political conventions, professional meetings, sports events (including an 1889 football game), dances, and speeches during the 19th and early 20th centuries.⁹

In the 19th century, there were several other large meeting halls and recreational structures available for rent, such as Witherspoon Hall (Walnut and Juniper Streets), the Industrial Arts Building (Broad Street above Vine), the Rink (23rd and Chestnut Streets), Musical Fund Hall (Locust Street above 8th), and Horticultural Hall (two successive locations on S. Broad Street). The large auditoriums of churches, theatres, and music halls also made effective meeting spaces. The Franklin Institute occasionally hosted trade shows, machinery exhibitions, and manufacturers' conventions.¹⁰ For the most part, short-term events and exhibitions were indiscriminately fit into existing buildings constructed for other specific uses. Although Philadelphia was the hub of the extensive Pennsylvania Railroad, this and other lines did not directly access most downtown locations, which hampered the production of substantial exhibitions.

By the turn of the century, Philadelphia and other cities across the United States acknowledged the need for a new building type designed specifically for this convention and exhibition phenomenon. In general terms, mayors, governors, and other politicians sought an attractive location for public events and a showcase for the area's resources. Manufacturers and businessmen desired a place to advertise their goods and to attract visitors to Philadelphia. Citizens and culture barons wanted a public arena for commemoration, celebration, entertainment, and recreation.

The new form would have to serve all of these needs, private and public, commercial and communal.

This new building type drew from many architectural examples. Armories and train sheds provided models of vast spaces roofed without intervening columns. Department stores, museums, arcades, and world's fair pavilions demonstrated programs for displaying large quantities of materials in an appealing and educational fashion. Social halls, theatres, and concert halls offered information on acoustics, lighting, seating, crowd flow, and other issues pertaining to auditoriums. City halls, libraries, and courthouses embodied the democratic ideals and dignity appropriate for a municipal building. From these existing types and for the emerging needs of American cities, architects developed a new building which featured a combination of meeting rooms, exhibition halls, at least one auditorium, and often support facilities like concession stands, coat rooms, men's and ladies' lounges, dressing rooms, and a restaurant. This building had to be centrally located so as to be convenient for the local population, and at the same time, immediately accessible by train for out-of-town visitors and oversized equipment.

This new building type, the municipal convention hall (or municipal auditorium), literally provided a structure for the social, cultural, economic, and political aspirations of its local populace. The construction of such a building was a civic endeavor, and it reflected the increasing might of municipal government during the Progressive era. Notably, some of the earliest examples of convention halls (like Cleveland's Public Auditorium (1922) and San Francisco's Civic Auditorium (1913)) can be found in the plans for civic centers conceived by proponents of the City Beautiful movement. During the first decades of the 20th century, the convention hall joined the ranks of other monumental municipal buildings. Like Penn's shady elm or

a New England town green, the convention hall marked a symbolic location for the activities of citizens and their leaders.

At the same time, the convention hall represented a city's foray into self-promotion to larger audiences—metropolitan, state, national, or international. Cities like Philadelphia recognized the excitement and the income generated by national conventions, international expositions, and trade shows. By establishing a permanent facility for conventions and exhibitions, cities attempted to institutionalize these previously ephemeral activities. The convention hall itself provided an appealing display for a constantly changing menu of goods, services, opportunities, and entertainments. The city learned to make a business of holding events, and commercial interests learned to make events of doing business.

The appearance of the convention hall on the American urban landscape was a nationwide phenomenon. Several nationally prominent architects (including John Galen Howard and Eliel Saarinen) and numerous government-appointed city architects developed designs for these buildings during the first four decades of the 20th century. Despite their appearance in hundreds of American cities and their often monumental size, these buildings have not received much critical attention. In their works concerning the City Beautiful movement, architectural historians have scarcely addressed convention halls and their role in the Progressive city. Studies of the period between the wars also make little mention of the busy convention hall-building phenomenon, which persisted even as ambitious city planning efforts of the Progressive era gave way to the make-work public works programs of the Depression. In fact, these new convention halls and municipal auditoriums failed to generate much press in contemporary national architectural periodicals.¹¹

On the other hand, the buildings were reported in contemporary planning-oriented magazines such as *The American City* and in local newspapers. These

buildings provide the physical structure for countless significant events in the lives of cities, their citizens, businesses, interest groups, political parties, and professional organizations. In the mid-1930s, Philadelphia's Convention Hall drew more than two million people annually, and other large municipal auditoriums posted comparable numbers.¹² Even so, cultural and social historians have not addressed the role of convention halls in American cities. When they examine given events or given participants, historians often fail to look at the actual wrapper. Much more work is generated on the few physical remains of spectacularly evanescent world's fairs than on the permanent institution that has succeeded in sustaining their messages.

If convention halls have escaped analysis in traditional histories, it is necessary to offer a different approach. In *The Power of Place*, Dolores Hayden touts a hybrid discipline which she calls the "social history of architecture." She urges historians "to look at power struggles as they appear in the planning, design, construction, use, and demolition of typical buildings."¹³ Though important to examine the individual and group motivations of players within each city, it is also useful to consider "the city" as a composite actor. A city-centered perspective can facilitate comparisons within a larger urban American context. Thus, a detailed reading of Philadelphia's early 20th century bid for a convention hall should open a window into the varied and complex issues at stake in similar efforts in other American cities. As a thesis in historic preservation, this work should challenge readers to consider the history of the convention hall in their own cities. The omnipresence of convention buildings on the late 20th century urban landscape deserves interrogation.

I examine the emergence of the municipal convention hall building type in the first four decades of the 20th century by focusing on the genesis of Philadelphia's Convention Hall. The idea to create a permanent public institution devoted to the

commercial aims of the world's fairs crystallized in 1894 with the establishment of the city's Commercial Museum. In Chapter 1, I consider how the Commercial Museum literally laid the foundations for the future Philadelphia Civic Center complex. Then I review the various initiatives to erect a permanent convention hall in Philadelphia during the first three decades of the 20th century. The third chapter discusses the early history of the Convention Hall constructed on the grounds of the Commercial Museum at the opening of the Great Depression. I conclude by reconsidering the municipal convention hall as an early 20th century building type and contemplating the fate of Philadelphia's Convention Hall.

Endnotes: Introduction

¹ "The Presidents' Summit: A Special Report," Section B, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 29 April 1997.

² Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, *Annual Report* 25 (1916), 28.

³ Pennsylvania Convention Center Authority, *Pennsylvania Convention Center: The Official Guide*, 1996, 4-5.

⁴ John R. Stilgoe, *Common Landscape of America, 1580 to 1845* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1982), 48.

⁵ An early example of a building constructed expressly for occasional, large-scale congregations was the Arch Street Friends Meeting House (1803-05, 1810-11), which hosted both local Quakers' meetings and the yearly meetings.

⁶ Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), 206-229.

⁷ James S. Chase, *Emergence of the Presidential Nominating Convention, 1789-1832* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1973), 189; Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 112, 128; Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (New York: Pantheon, 1989), 180-84.

⁸ J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884* (Philadelphia: L.H. Everts, 1884), II: 948-50.

⁹ "The Gardeners' Exhibition," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated News*, 4 June 1853; John Francis Marion, *Within These Walls: A History of the Academy of Music in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Academy of Music, 1984), 117-18.

¹⁰ "New Horticultural Hall," 15 August 1895 in II: 14-15 of Castner Collection, Print and Picture Department, Free Library of Philadelphia; "Minutes and Proceedings of the 5th Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Colour" (Philadelphia: William P. Gibbons, 1835), Library Company of Philadelphia; "Souvenir of the 40th Annual Session of the International Typographers' Union," 1892, Ephemera Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter HSP); Joseph Jackson, *Encyclopedia of Philadelphia* (Harrisburg: National Historical Association, 1932), III: 924; "Catalogue of the 1st Bench Show of Dogs by the Philadelphia Kennel Club," (Philadelphia: Thomas S. Dando, 1879), Ephemera Collection, HSP. The Franklin Institute claimed to have sponsored the first

exhibition of American manufactures at Carpenter's Hall in 1824. See "Franklin Institute's First Exposition," *Bulletin of the National Export Exposition I*, no. 20 (5 October 1899), 3-4. The Franklin Institute also occasionally constructed special exhibition buildings such as the Electrical Fair Hall (ca. 1880s).

¹¹ See David Brownlee, *Building the City Beautiful: The Benjamin Franklin Parkway and the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1989), William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1989), and M. Christine Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983).

¹² Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration, *WPA Guide to Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 494.

¹³ Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 30.

Chapter 1

An Ongoing World's Fair: The Commercial Museum

Chicago was the first expression of American thought as a unity;
one must start there.¹

—Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (1903)

➡ *A legacy of the fair*

Robert Rydell concluded his examination of turn-of-the-century American international expositions by offering another approach to understanding their cultural legacy. Not only did world's fairs reflect American culture, but they were "intended to shape that culture."² Perhaps the most influential American international exposition, the 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition provided a model for City Beautiful planning, showcased an "American Renaissance" brand of neoclassical architecture, celebrated American imperialism, and advertised American manufactures. These are familiar features of the fair, but the event itself can also be viewed as a carefully manufactured product, ready for export.

The World's Columbian Exhibition was an exemplar of event-making. The Chicago power elite of business magnates, architects, planners, and government officials successfully manufactured a world historic occasion from nothing more than the celebration of an anniversary (and a year late at that). Almost 28 million Americans came to Chicago in 1893, and millions more learned about the great fair from friends and publications. While the 1876 Centennial Exposition commemorated Philadelphia's role in the birth of the United States a century before, the City of Chicago had no particular claim to Columbus's arrival in North America.³ But, as Henry Adams commented, "The Exposition itself defied philosophy. One might find fault till the last gate closed, one could still explain nothing that needed explanation."⁴ Like other world's fairs, the World's Columbian Exhibition taught that the dazzling display of products created its own occasion.

As a cultural model and as a historic event the World's Columbian Exhibition endured even when the temporary pavilions were dismantled and the plaster decorations washed away. Among its less-studied survivors are the institutions that attempted to salvage some permanent legacy of the Fair by harvesting its physical remains. This chapter will explore the early history of one such entity, Philadelphia's Commercial Museum, whose first collections and whose commercial idealism arrived from Chicago in 1894. This museum embodied the peculiar relationship between the evanescence of the world's fair and the stability of the municipal institution. The Commercial Museum was an innovative organization which uniquely attempted to institutionalize America's dramatically evolving international commercial interests. Built to contain artifacts and services, its physical and organizational structure eventually came to house events. In this respect, it was an important antecedent of the municipal auditorium.

☛ *The Commercial Museum*

Several museums directly benefited from the close of the World's Columbian Exhibition in December 1893. Fair organizers launched the Field Columbian Museum (later Field Museum of Natural History), which initially housed industrial and commercial displays salvaged directly from the fair. The Smithsonian Institution, some of whose curators directed the fair's ethnological exhibits, was rewarded with hefty collections. Though it would not open until 1915, the year of the Panama-California Exposition, San Diego's Museum of Man acquired its initial collections at the Columbian Exhibition. And some thirty-three years after the fair closed, the former Palace for Fine Arts was rebuilt piece by piece in limestone and occupied by the new Museum of Science and Industry. Each of these museums intended to capitalize on the momentum or legacy generated by the World's Columbian Exhibition or on its expertly arranged exhibits.⁵

Philadelphia, too, staked a claim to the remains of the World's Columbian Exhibition. During his 1893 visit to Chicago, University of Pennsylvania plant biology professor William P. Wilson (1845-1927) envisioned an institution that permanently conserved and enlarged the Columbian Exhibition's displays of international manufactures and raw materials. Such a "great group of Museums—General, Scientific, Economic, Educational, and Commercial"⁶ would both aid American businessmen trading abroad and inform the general public. Wilson returned to Philadelphia to gather the support of local businessmen, political officials, and leading citizens such as Mayor Edwin S. Stuart, Councilman Thomas S. Meehan, the Commissioners of Fairmount Park, and Board of Education member Simon Gratz. In October 1893, Councils allowed the Park Commission to appropriate up to \$10,000 for Wilson to pack and ship the collections back to Philadelphia.⁷

Despite an earlier plan to erect the Museums in Fairmount Park, the city ordinance of 15 June 1894 called for the establishment of the Philadelphia Museums in a park on the University of Pennsylvania campus. Dr. Wilson (director) and Dr. William Pepper (chairman and University provost) anticipated an institutional group set in an extensive botanical garden that in effect served as an outdoor museum. Pepper had recently founded the Museum of Archeological of the Free Museum of Science and Art (now the University Museum), which was being designed in 1893.⁸

The model Wilson and Pepper had in mind was the group of museums at South Kensington, near London. Organized by a former commissioner of the Great Exhibition of 1851, this complex of institutions of science, industrial arts, and natural history were intended to institutionalize Britain's industrial and scientific ascendancy. Critic Nikolaus Pevsner comments that "This cultural centre may be

said to represent the climax of that faith in the propagation of intellectual achievement which characterized the middle classes. . . , and was also the faith of Prince Albert and Queen Victoria.”⁹ In Philadelphia, however, only plans for the Commercial Museum were realized. Although the Commercial Museum would eventually move to a site near the University Museum, Pepper’s death in 1898 derailed the effort that might have linked the two institutions in a larger complex. The specific brand of commercial museum, with exhibits and services geared to manufacturers and traders, also had a European precedent. Commercial museums in several of Europe’s industrial capitals (Vienna, Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Bremen, Antwerp) served as prototypes for the first such institution in the United States.¹⁰

Wilson had campaigned for his museum project by claiming that Philadelphia had failed to capitalize on the legacy of the Centennial Exposition of 1876. When this stunningly successful world’s fair closed, Philadelphia ranked first in the nation in manufacturing output, and its thriving textile, iron, steel, coal, and machinery production earned the city the epithet “Workshop of the World.” Historian Steven Conn argues that Wilson’s argument was somewhat unfair. Centennial organizers had attempted to perpetuate the mission of the fair and to promote Philadelphia industry by chartering the Pennsylvania Museum & School of Industrial Art and housing it in one of the Centennial’s few permanent structures, Memorial Hall.¹¹

The Pennsylvania Museum’s exhibitions of contemporary industrial design objects were intended to teach “workmen and those who are becoming workmen”¹² by example and thus serve the practical end of improving the quality of industrial production. As its collections grew to encompass works of art and ethnological specimens as well, the Museum proved popular among middle and working class visitors. On the other hand, wealthier benefactors (perhaps employers of those

workmen) had different expectations for a new city museum: they demanded a more traditional art museum. Conn suggests that in Gilded Age Philadelphia, major museums served as surrogate educational institutions to a democratic audience, but they also were also sites of class conflict.¹³

Although they supported the School of Industrial Art (which settled in a downtown location by 1893), Philadelphia business interests slowly withdrew their support for the general industrial arts programming offered at the Pennsylvania Museum. Around the same time, a new exhibition space was created in the basement of the Philadelphia Bourse. The Machinery Exhibition and Sales Room opened in 1896 “for the purpose of affording a central place where all kinds of machinery and mechanical appurtenances can be shown and sold”¹⁴ (*fig. 5*). Its 18,000 square feet contained bargaining tables in the midst of fully operational models—all arranged for the benefit of the buyer, not the spectator. Though the showroom resembled a museum gallery, it explicitly paired the functions of display and consumption. Like museum exhibits, presentations of consumer goods also imposed order on an increasingly confusing material world by borrowing from the taxonomic and evolutionary models of natural science. If thoughtfully organized and presented, objects could express meaning and influence human activity. In this respect, the salesroom, the department store, and the trade show of the era closely resembled the natural history museum, the art gallery, and the collection of antiquities.

The Commercial Museum combined the direct economic aims of the Bourse salesroom and the popular education of the Pennsylvania Museum in a government-sponsored institution. This linkage of business, education, and government was present in the composition of the Board of Trustees. Its members included City and State officials; representatives elected by the Board of Public Education, the Park

Commission, and the City Councils; and fourteen prominent Philadelphians—who included transportation barons W.L. Elkins and P.A.B. Widener and leading merchant John Wanamaker as well as Dr. Pepper and University archaeologist Sara Stevenson. Likewise, when the first twenty-five boxcars of exhibit material from Chicago arrived in Philadelphia in the spring of 1894, their contents were temporarily put on display in nineteen rooms of City Hall, corridors of the Girls' Normal School and the School of Design for Women, and several commercial buildings.¹⁵ These sites of government, education, and commerce lent a civic legitimacy to the new institution.

Between 1896 and 1900, the Commercial Museum paid a nominal rental fee to use the Pennsylvania Railroad's former office building at 233 S. 4th Street. This location offered 200,000 square feet of floor space on four floors (*fig. 6*). In the Museum's first decade, public programming was limited to exhibitions. Early displays resembled or replicated those from the World's Columbian Exhibition with small signs amidst methodically ordered rows and rows of material (*fig. 7*). Collections were arranged by country of origin, by raw material, and by manufactured product. A hands-on "commercial geography" taught the general public about foreign countries according to their available goods and materials.¹⁶

For businessmen, the "commercial geography" represented an international market in which to view (and sample and price) items prior to purchase. Like the contemporary department store, the Commercial Museum not only offered an unprecedented abundance of products but also provided a number of ancillary services. The Scientific and Experimental Department featured a laboratory in which staff analyzed raw materials such as ores, minerals, metals, coals, animal and vegetable materials, fibers and the products manufactured from these materials. The

Bureau of Information (later called the Foreign Trade Bureau) helped to forge trade agreements between American manufacturers and international merchants and suppliers. Its resources included a Commercial Library of trade publications and government reports; a series of informational files on such topics as customs, treaties, tariffs, transportation, communication, and currency; and a display of merchandise currently sold abroad. The Bureau also sponsored staff expeditions abroad to gather collections and ran a publication department that issued pamphlets on trade conditions for various materials and with various countries. Finally, the Museum organized a series of Commercial Congresses which served as international conventions for government officials and members of commercial organizations.¹⁷

William P. Wilson's ambitious vision can not be underestimated. Situated in Philadelphia, the Commercial Museum succeeded in attracting a significant local clientele, but its services were available to the nation at large, and its reach was global. Prior to the 20th century, no other institution in the western hemisphere featured the array of commercial information, services, or materials assembled at 233 S. 4th Street, Philadelphia. When the United States emerged from the Spanish-American War (1898) an international imperial power, the Commercial Museum provided American businessmen with a place to launch their conquests of international markets. And when the U.S. Government established its Department of Commerce (and Labor) in 1903, it replicated the businessmen's services provided by the Commercial Museum.¹⁸

Of the various institutions formed in the wake of the World's Columbian Exhibition, Philadelphia's truly embodied the goals of the fair. Of course, the Commercial Museum shed many of the less commercial aspects of the fair—the art exhibits, the historic recreations, the ethnological villages. It also fell short of Wilson's

plan to create a complex of museums for the City of Philadelphia. Nonetheless, the Commercial Museum institutionalized the commercial optimism of an emerging imperial power. At the 1897 dedication ceremonies, President William McKinley declared, "One national industrial undertaking prepares the way for another. . . .The World's Columbian Exhibition at Chicago, glorious testimonial as it was to the world's progress, was the forerunner of this less general but more permanent institution for the world's economic progress."¹⁹

☛ *The National Export Exposition*

The success of Wilson's project owed to its timeliness as well as to the cumulative endorsement by contributing interests. Foreign countries demonstrated their approval by contributing raw materials, manufactured products, and information and by sending delegates to conferences sponsored by the Commercial Museum. Financial assistance from American business interests appeared in the form of annual fees paid to use the Foreign Trade Bureau, sponsorship of staff expeditions abroad, and funding of special events held at the Commercial Museum. Public support manifested itself in the growing numbers of schoolchildren and college students who visited the Museum's collections. City Council demonstrated the city's approval through three ordinances (1895, 1896, 1897) that transferred to the Board of Trustees fifty-six acres of land in West Philadelphia, extending from 34th and Vintage Avenue (now Civic Center Boulevard) along the Schuylkill River to a point 220 feet south of University Avenue.²⁰

Nonetheless, the Commercial Museum lacked the resources to construct its own permanent quarters. The solution required a return to the very origins of the institution: in order to drum up enough funds to create permanent housing for the collections, the Museum mounted its own world's fair. As Dr. Wilson explained, the Pan American Commercial Congress of 1897, had two goals: "first, to bring the

people together to see what we could export from this country, and second, to endeavor to secure money for our buildings and support."²¹ The Commercial Museum succeeded in raising pledges of \$350,000 from the U.S. Government, \$200,000 from the City of Philadelphia, \$100,000 from Philadelphia businesses, and \$150,000 from the State of Pennsylvania for its world's fair. The resulting National Export Exposition would provide a dazzling three-and-a-half-month long opening ceremony for the new home of the Commercial Museum.²²

Workers broke ground for the fair on 27 March 1899. In less than six months, a city of exhibition and amusement buildings rose on the West Philadelphia property (*fig. 8*). When the National Export Exposition officially opened on September 14, its buildings were complete, its exhibits installed, and its grounds fully landscaped. Visitors admitted at the main entrance on South Street walked along the Gay Esplanade, which imitated the World's Columbian Exhibition's Midway Plaisance with its hodgepodge of assorted amusements. These included pavilions showcasing the likes of "Jim Key, Educated Horse" and Chiquita the Cuban midget, restaurants and lunchrooms, such new technological spectacles as Lubin's Cineograph and Edison's Electrical Fairyland, and ethnic enclaves like the Chinese Village and the Cairo Theatre.²³

The 800' long Esplanade culminated at the entrance to the Main Exhibition Building—actually a group of five individual buildings "so constructed as to form one grand and imposing structure about 400' x 950' in exterior dimensions, and covering an area of more than eight acres"²⁴ (*fig. 9*). The three identical, permanent, 2-story, 88' x 378' pavilions featured steel frame construction with brick walls. A temporary, wood frame auditorium (140' x 200') flanked by two exhibition galleries (each 78' x 300') linked the North and Center pavilions; a grand, one-story, wood frame

exhibition hall (297' x 383') spanned between the central and south pavilions. Some devices installed in the buildings served as object lessons that introduced visitors to such new technologies as the moving staircase and electric and hydraulic elevators.²⁵

The main exhibition complex represented a collaboration between two prominent Philadelphia architectural firms, the Wilson Brothers and the Hewitt Brothers. Known for their engineering expertise, the Wilsons had designed the Main Building and Machinery Hall for the Centennial as well as a number of monumental buildings for the Pennsylvania Railroad, including the Reading Terminal and Train Shed (1891-93). They probably designed the structural system of the exhibition buildings.²⁶ The Hewitt Brothers were probably responsible for the exterior decoration in white plaster and papier-mâché in imitation of classical architecture. The allegorical sculpture installed on the main group represented the six continents and themes of abundance and international trade. One columnist in the *Exposition Bulletin* gushed:

The great building will have all the architectural embellishment a structure of this kind can afford, compatible with the somewhat classic but not severe character of its design. . . .When the sunlight blazes down upon the big white edifice, throwing into relief its simple lines, the effect will be striking and most agreeable. . . .When finished, the building will look like a great marble palace seen at a little distance, and the impression will only be interrupted by the presence of innumerable little flags, flying from staffs mounted at equal distances apart, on the roof balustrade.²⁷

Another article in the same publication described the complex more succinctly:

"Philadelphia's 'White City.'"²⁸ The exteriors of the Main Exhibition Building specifically evoked the imperial splendor, the order, and the largesse of the World's Columbian Exhibition's grand court. Steven Conn suggests that the neoclassical architectural packaging ironically disguised the frenzy of international commerce and the excitement of the world's fair. Perhaps the colorful assortment of honkytonk

midway structures would have offered a more apt structure for a commercial museum.²⁹

Although produced on a curtailed schedule and a limited budget, the general program of the National Export Exposition was not unlike that of the World's Columbian Exhibition and other contemporary expositions: to mount an appealing show that demonstrated the region's and the nation's commercial might to a wide audience. During its three-month run, it entertained 1.25 million visitors with electric light displays, Midway-type amusements, musical performances, automobile speed trials, and extensive exhibits. The third Commercial Congress, held on site in October, attracted hundreds of distinguished government officials and businessmen. Measured by the standards of the period's smaller world's fairs, the National Export Exposition was a respectably successful production.³⁰

Unlike other fairs, however, the National Export Exposition was a temporary event staged for the sake of a permanent institution. When the fair closed in December, the five year-old Commercial Museum emerged with fifty-six landscaped acres, a tremendous infrastructure of permanent and temporary buildings, tons of new collections, and a mission known the world over. Perhaps no other museum ever had such a fabulous opening. As Director William P. Wilson settled the Commercial Museum into the roomy pavilions and exhibition halls, decorations were removed from the buildings, temporary structures were disassembled, banners and other vestiges of the fair were removed. The young institution enacted a self-fulfilling prophecy: the best architecture to house the contents of world's fairs was world's fair architecture. Though its bones were stripped of superfluous ornament, the vast exhibition areas, the large meeting spaces, and the classical massing of the buildings

all survived to describe the architectural appearance of a new institution, a ongoing world's fair.

☛ *A new institution*

A short six months after the National Export Exposition closed, the nation's attention returned to the site on the Schuylkill. The temporary wood frame auditorium (between the North and Center Pavilions) supplied the setting for the National Republican Convention of June 1900 (*fig. 10*). The building's internal arrangement featured a wide, raised stage overlooking an open floor and side galleries—all filled with individual wood chairs. The same space had hosted the International Commercial Congress, musical performances, and other gatherings during the Export Exposition. It was only the surface decorations—the trappings of political conventions—that really distinguished this different use. Red, white, and blue festoons hung from the rafters, garlands and presidential seals decorated the columns, and 20,000 delegates waved placards announcing their home states. The event itself redefined the space. In the former auditorium of the National Export Exposition, the Commercial Museum's most famous well-wisher, President William McKinley, received the Republicans' nomination.³¹

The various buildings on the West Philadelphia site had been constructed to be this flexible. The fair had required vast spaces that could accommodate crowds of people examining large exhibits from textile samples to farm machinery. The buildings were essentially empty volumes in which exhibitors constructed smaller presentations which collectively defined the larger space. As the fledgling institution settled into the fair complex, other interest groups (such as the Republicans) began to eye the site for their own particular functions. Over its next thirty years, the Commercial Museum would evolve to fulfill its role as a municipal institution.

Logistically, the Commercial Museum had to contend with the best way to distribute its services and collections within the surviving fair structures. Almost every significant international exposition since 1893 contributed exhibits: five hundred tons from the Paris Exposition of 1900, twenty carloads from the St. Louis Exposition of 1904, and so on. Together with the materials collected by Museum staff and those donated by private individuals, the volume of collections grew exponentially. Meanwhile, the number of buildings owned by the Museum declined. The Esplanade structures and the great Transportation and Implements Buildings were demolished after the fair closed, and the auditorium came down in 1903. Only five buildings—the North, Center, and South Pavilions (hereafter North, Center, and South Buildings), the Grand Exhibition Hall, and the Power House—survived.³²

The North Building received the most attention because of its prominent location facing Pine Street and its heavy use by staff and businessmen. The Commercial Museum's 1907 *Annual Report* described the process by which the old front had been "entirely stripped of its disintegrating staff facing and mouldings, leaving only the original brick walls and window openings."³³ The architectural firm of Brockie and Hastings applied a new seventeen inch thick surface of brick and white terra cotta and a two foot high channeled granite base to the building (*fig. 11*). The main elevation has a tripartite arrangement, including a central portico with paired Corinthian columns. Large windows with arched tops appear on all four sides of the building. Although Museum administration intended for all of the buildings to be so "redesigned and refaced," only the North Building received this treatment. The other buildings' brick walls were exposed and later surfaced with stucco.³⁴

The North Building's first floor housed public exhibits, and the second floor contained staff offices and the rooms housing the professional services offered by the institution. The space inhabited by the Foreign Trade Bureau provided a private professional enclave within the walls of the public institution (*fig. 12*). Businessmen could pay an annual fee for the Bureau's diverse services, which alone generated an annual income that peaked at \$142,000 in 1920. An official depository of the U.S. Government, the extensive library contained thousands of books, pamphlets, foreign periodicals, consular reports, manufacturers' catalogues, and directories. The Bureau's information service and translation department were tremendous resources for local businessmen. The publications department began to issue its own periodicals: *Weekly Export Bulletin* for American manufacturers; *Commercial America*, *America Comercial*, and *American Manufacturers Registered Report* for foreign buyers; as well as various magazines and pamphlets about specific products like automobiles, machinery, and apparel.³⁵

Photographs and statistics presented in the *Annual Reports* suggest that institutional goals had been dichotomized between services to aid the private business community and programs to educate the general public. Businessmen utilized the Foreign Trade Bureau, and schoolchildren visited the exhibitions. The great, window-lined spaces of the North, Central, and South Buildings challenged curators to abandon the one-theme/one-room layout of the 4th Street location. Rather than lining the walls with samples, they seem to have confined much of the collections to freestanding glass cases (*fig. 13*). Gone were the distinctively exuberant and crammed world's fair displays created by each country to impress spectators. Commercial Museum curators instead enforced an unrelentingly methodological, "scientific" display aesthetic throughout the large halls. Another curatorial

development appeared in the increased use of dioramas with their mannequins frozen in the act of basketweaving, coal mining, or some like activity. The exhibition halls gradually came to resemble a natural history museum where the collections were preserved as specimens rather than showcased as salable commodities.³⁶

At the same time, the Commercial Museum greatly expanded its educational services. The year 1906 marked the inauguration of a formal tour program in which staff conducted schoolchildren through the exhibits. The success of the tours encouraged the Museum to establish a series of hour-long lectures, slide shows, and films for students. Later, the two programs were combined to allow students to examine and handle the collections with which they had just been presented. Another popular service originated in 1900, when the Museum began its distribution of exhibition cabinets to Pennsylvania schools. Each unit was a "miniature museum" with "several hundred specimens of the most important products that make up the commerce of the world" arranged in a series of shallow drawers.³⁷ Between 1900 and 1910, the Commercial Museum issued 2500 of these cabinets to schools throughout the Commonwealth.³⁸ Such programs taught children the rudiments of capitalism and consumption.

For its first few decades, the Commercial Museum engaged in a balancing act between various interest groups, private and public. Local commercial firms and businessmen who thought the Foreign Trade Bureau an invaluable resource repaid the Commercial Museum with funds and collections as well as with public support. From their positions in government and in commercial organizations, business figures prominent in the local community ensured that the city and state would continue to support the institution's work, even if at a nominal level. As a result of their efforts, some public funds flowed back to the Museum to support the educational

programming. For example, the State Legislature subsidized the traveling exhibition cabinets, and the City Board of Education assigned three full-time teachers and a clerk to the Museum assist with school visits.³⁹

Nominal to moderate support, however, could not sustain the Museum's many services, its extensive infrastructure, and its staff of 120. In the pages of Museum publications and at his own public appearances, Director William P. Wilson underscored the institution's need for substantial public funding. At a November 1909 meeting of the City Club, Wilson opened his address with the following plea:

I have to say a word to you today about the Philadelphia Museums. It is a municipal institution, and that means that you, members of the City Club, own it, and that you have an especial interest in it, because it is your property. I want therefore to begin today by giving you an urgent invitation to come out to West Philadelphia and inspect the institution.⁴⁰

The gravity of his words owed in part to costly maintenance needs and the mounting land crisis.

By the following spring, the expanding University of Pennsylvania had convinced Mayor John Reyburn to repeal the ordinances that had awarded fifty-six acres (in five tracts of land) to the Trustees of the Commercial Museum. Fortunately for the Museum, a 1911 taxpayer suit challenged the University's acquisition of the property. The citizen argued that the land had been historically reserved for the public weal and could not be possessed by a private entity. This suit was succeeded by a 1912 bill in equity filed on behalf of the Museum Board against the City. The following year, the national government intervened: it had given \$300,000 for the National Export Exposition with the understanding that the property would provide the permanent home of the Commercial Museum. Following a 1914 appeal by the University, the Supreme Court settled the case to the satisfaction of both sides in February 1916. The University was awarded four of the five tracts of land, and the

fifth tract belonged to the Museum Board "so long as the land and buildings are in good faith used for the purpose of the museum."⁴¹

Although the land issue eventually was resolved, building maintenance needs presented a constant source of worry for the Museum. Due to lack of funds, the installation of terra cotta on the North Hall had to take place in two separate campaigns. The 1913 *Annual Report* announced that "Valuable collections. . .are deteriorating"⁴² as a result of the rundown conditions of the Grand Exhibition Hall. Various maintenance tasks, systems updates, and interior alterations took place on a case-by-case basis, but the Museum could not afford a thorough transformation of the exposition structures into sturdy museum buildings. As a result of the doubts about land and maintenance, Director Wilson was not always confident that the Museum was permanently settled at its West Philadelphia site. He considered relocating at least as late as 1910, and plans for the Fairmount Parkway included a building for the Commercial Museum as late as 1917-19.⁴³

One solution to this problem had manifest itself as early as 1901, when the Forest, Fish and Game Association requested permission to rent the Auditorium and Grand Exhibition Hall for a month to showcase sporting goods and outdoors equipment. Although the buildings offered tremendous floor space in a convenient location, their poor condition was considered a possible deterrent to visitors. Both parties arranged an agreement whereby the Association not only paid \$3500 in rent to the City but also paid another \$7500 for repairs, heat, and maintenance. As more rental contracts were made, this sort of agreement became the standard, and the condition of the Grand Exhibition Hall and the Center and South Halls benefited incrementally.⁴⁴

In her history of the Philadelphia Civic Center, staff historian Ruth H. Hunter makes two important points about the early rentals by the Republican National Convention (1900) and the Forest, Fish and Game Association (1901). First of all, she distinguishes between the two rentals and discusses the precedent they set. Trade shows pay fees because they in turn charge the public for admission or sell exhibition space, but conventions that draw large crowds to the area do not. The two types of events sustain one another. The general event allows local businesses (hotels, restaurants, etc.) to sell their services to a captive audience. Also, the general event generates publicity for the sale of more specialized rentals, which in turn, contribute directly to city coffers.⁴⁵

Secondly, Hunter explains that the Forest, Fish and Game program represented an early example of what is now called a trade show. As opposed to the horizontally-organized world's fair, with its presentation of a wide array of products by country of origin, the vertically-organized trade show used "the exhibit technique to promote the sale of commercial products in a particular industry."⁴⁶ From food fairs to automobile shows (*fig. 14*), trade shows provided venues for national firms to advertise their products to local markets. Also, the fact that the Commercial Museum's first renter was a sporting goods show confirms the commodification of leisure activities at the turn-of-the-century: American consumers had more money (and time) to spend on entertaining themselves. Although trade show rentals marked a significant departure from the Museum's international agenda, American manufacturers and distributors clearly recognized a lucrative domestic mass market.⁴⁷

If the Commercial Museum served as an ongoing world's fair, it was not only as a result of the galleries of international products on display. In fact, as the Museum's fortunes declined in the 1920s, the condition of the galleries suffered, and

the exhibitions themselves became artifacts of past fairs. The creation of the Foreign Trade Bureau, the availability of translation and wire services, and the Museum's many publications gave practical forms to the commercial aims of the fairs. The increasing use of the exhibition spaces for trade shows truly captured the excitement of American commerce. Through these shows—and other unique events—new goods, services, and populations flowed in and out of the Museum. Trade show, convention, gallery tour, business lecture—the walls of the Commercial Museum could contain any of these activities. Fisherman, politician, fourth-grader, manufacturer—the Commercial Museum could offer services to any of these citizens. During its first decades in its permanent home in West Philadelphia, the Commercial Museum gradually defined its role as a municipal institution as different constituencies made their demands upon it. By definition, the Commercial Museum was a responsive institution which catered to the whims of the market and the needs of its customers.

Endnotes: Chapter 1

¹ *The Education of Henry Adams* (New York: Modern Library, 1931), 343.

² Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), 237.

³ James Gilbert, "World's Fairs as Historic Events" in *Fair Representations: World's Fairs and the Modern World*, Rydell and Nancy Gwinn, eds. (Amsterdam: VU Univ. Press, 1994), 13-22.

⁴ Adams, *Education*, 339.

⁵ Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 69; Rydell, "The Culture of Imperial Abundance: World's Fairs in the Making of American Culture" in *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920*, Simon J. Bronner, ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 210-11; Jay Pridmore, *Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago* (New York: Harry B. Abrams, Inc., 1996), 19.

⁶ Ordinance of 15 Jun. 1894 reprinted in *Second Annual Message of Mayor John Weaver with Annual Reports* (Philadelphia: City of Philadelphia, 1905), I:545.

⁷ "The Philadelphia Commercial Museum," *Bulletin of the National Export Exposition* (hereafter *BNEE*) I, no. 29 (7 Dec. 1899): 1-6.

⁸ Ordinance of 15 Jun. 1894 reprinted in *Second Annual Message*, I: 545; Steven Conn, "To Organize and Display: Museums and American Culture, 1876-1926" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1994), 181-83.

- ⁹ Gavin Stamp and Colin Amery, *Victorian Buildings of London, 1837-1887: An Illustrated Guide* (London: The Architectural Press, 1980), 61; Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner, *London: North West*, rev. ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 486. Another link between world's fairs and museums was Sir Patrick Geddes. He proposed an "Index Museum that organized and displayed the contents of industrial exhibitions. See M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 213-22.
- ¹⁰ William Harper, "Address" in *Philadelphia Commercial Museum: Proceedings of the International Advisory Board* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Commercial Museum, 1897), 76-77. The Museo Comercial de Mexico opened in 1918. See Alberto J. Pani, *Discurso* (Mexico: Oficina Impresora de la Secretaria de Hacienda, 1918).
- ¹¹ Conn, "Organize," 293.
- ¹² "The Art Museum Project," no cite, n.d. (1876?) as quoted by Conn, "Organize," 298.
- ¹³ Conn, "Organize," 294-300; 322-28, 16.
- ¹⁴ "The Machinery Exhibition and Sales Room of the Philadelphia Bourse," [1900?], Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter HSP).
- ¹⁵ Ruth H. Hunter, *The Trade and Convention Center of Philadelphia: Its Birth and Renaissance* (Philadelphia: City of Philadelphia, 1962), 5; Philadelphia Museums, *Annual Report* (1914), 9-10.
- ¹⁶ William P. Wilson, "The Commercial Museum of Philadelphia," *City Club Bulletin* 1, no. 5 (18 Nov. 1909): 47; Hunter, *Trade*, 5, 11.
- ¹⁷ *Philadelphia Commercial Museum* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Commercial Museum, [1898?], 10-16.
- ¹⁸ Hunter, *Trade*, 15.
- ¹⁹ William McKinley, "Address" in *Proceedings*, 46-47.
- ²⁰ Hunter, *Trade*, 15.
- ²¹ Wilson, "The Commercial Museum of Philadelphia," 49.
- ²² *Ibid.*; "On the Esplanade," *BNEE* I, no. 17 (14 Sep. 1899): 14.
- ²³ "Rapid Work On Buildings," *BNEE* I, no. 1 (18 May 1899): 3-6. Rydell notes that the developer of the Gay Esplanade was one of the creators of the 1893 Midway Plaisance at Chicago. See Rydell, "Abundance," 214.
- ²⁴ "The Philadelphia Exposition," (1899), 6, Ephemera Collection, HSP.
- ²⁵ John Andrew Gallery, ed., *Philadelphia Architecture: A Guide to the City*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Foundation for Architecture, 1994), 146; "Rapid," *BNEE*, 3-5; "Main Exposition Building," *BNEE* I, no. 3 (1 Jun. 1899): 5.
- ²⁶ "Architects of the Exposition Buildings," *BNEE* I, no. 3 (1 Jun. 1899): inside back cover; "Rapid," *BNEE*, 3-5; The Wilson Brothers also designed the three other large-scale structures for the fair. These were the Implement, Vehicle, and Furniture Building, Power Plant, and Transportation Building. Situated immediately adjacent to the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks, the Transportation Building allowed for locomotives, railroad cars, electric cars, and electric trains to roll in one end and out the other. See "Trade With Far East," *BNEE* I, no. 15 (31 Aug. 1899): 3.
- ²⁷ "Exposition's Artistic Side," *BNEE* I, no. 8 (13 Jul. 1899): 5.
- ²⁸ "Fine Progress Made," *BNEE* I, no. 12 (10 Aug. 1899): 3.
- ²⁹ Conn, "Organize," 186-87. In an essay entitled "Aesthetic Ideology and Urban Design," Barbara Rubin suggests that world's fair midways anticipated the commercial strip malls of the 20th century. See *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*, eds. Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1986), 489.
- ³⁰ *BNEE* I, no. 17 (14 Sep. 1899); "Lights that will Delight," *BNEE* I, no. 15 (31 Aug. 1899): 5; William Mill Butler, ed., preface to *Official Proceedings of the International Commercial*

Congress: A Conference for all Nations for the Extension of Commerce (Philadelphia: Press of the Philadelphia Commercial Museum, 1899).

³¹ It was fitting that the Republican delegates gathered to renominate William McKinley as the Republican presidential candidate in the shell of an old world's fair structure. In addition to his efforts on behalf of the Commercial Museum, the President had secured the United States its first pieces of an overseas empire, negotiated the Hay-Pauncefote treaties which enabled the construction of the Panama Canal, protected American manufacturers with a high tariff on imported goods, and participated in a handful of international expositions (he would be assassinated at the Pan-American in Buffalo one year later). *The Life of William McKinley* (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1901).

³² Philadelphia Museums, *Annual Report* (1905).

³³ Philadelphia Museums, *Annual Report* (1907), 14.

³⁴ Philadelphia Museums, *Annual Report* (1905); Philadelphia Museums, *Annual Report* (1907), 14-17; Clio Group, Inc., "Civic Center Museum," Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form, 1981 (revised 1983), in "Civic Center Museum" file, Philadelphia Historic Commission; "Museum Buildings Greatly Improved," *Public Ledger*, 19 Aug. 1907. For photographs of the Museum buildings from 1910 and 1913, see the Grounds Along the Schuylkill Collection, Univ. of Pennsylvania Archives.

³⁵ Wilson, "The Commercial Museum of Philadelphia," *City Club Bulletin* I, no. 5 (18 Nov. 1910), 50; Philadelphia Museums, *Annual Report* (1907), 12-14.

³⁶ Philadelphia Museums, *Annual Reports* (1907-1910).

³⁷ Philadelphia Museums, *Annual Report* (1918-1919-1920), 17.

³⁸ Hunter, *Trade*, 32-38.

³⁹ Philadelphia Museums, *Annual Report* (1915).

⁴⁰ Wilson, "The Commercial Museum of Philadelphia," 50.

⁴¹ "City Will Retain Museum Grounds Says Dr. Wilson," no cite, 28 May 1910, *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* News Clipping Collection, Urban Archives, Temple University (hereafter BTU); "Mayor Signs Bill Giving Penn Land," *Evening Bulletin* (hereafter *EB*), 13 Jun. 1910; "Sue To Recover University Land," *EB*, 4 Apr. 1911; "U.S. Will Join In Museum Suit To Regain Lands," no cite, 9 Jan. 1913, BTU; "City-U. Of P. Deal Attacked In Court," *EB*, 19 Jun. 1913; "Museum Retains Land It Occupies," *EB*, 21 Dec. 1913; "U. of P. Land Case Will Be Appealed," *EB*, 3 Oct. 1914; "Court Satisfies Both Sides," *EB*, 2 Feb. 1916.

⁴² Philadelphia Museums, *Annual Report* (1913), 19.

⁴³ "City Will Retain Museum Grounds Says Dr. Wilson," no cite, 28 May 1910, BTU; *The Fairmount Parkway: A Pictorial Record of Development* (Philadelphia: Fairmount Park Art Association, 1919).

⁴⁴ Hunter, *Trade*, 48-49.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 180-84; Richard Butsch, "Introduction: Leisure and Hegemony in America" and Stephen Hardy, "'Adopted by All the Leading Clubs': Sporting Goods and the Shaping of Leisure, 1800-1900" in Butsch, *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1990), 14, 81-89.

Chapter 2
*A “great place where the whole citizenship of Philadelphia
could assemble”:
Visions of a Convention Hall*

Some people seem to think that all you have to do to develop a city beautiful
is to construct a sewer or two.¹

--Charles B. Hall, president of Philadelphia City Council, 1926

☛ *White City revisited*

If the White City made its first Philadelphia appearance at the 1899 National Export Exposition, it reappeared along the Fairmount Parkway a few decades later. With its projected axial arrangement of classically-inspired buildings housing municipal institutions, the Parkway demonstrated the growing influence of the City Beautiful movement, which had been partially inspired by Daniel Burnham's plans for the central court of the World's Columbian Exhibition. This “aesthetic reform” movement also coincided with the rise of municipal government, the development of the planning profession, social and political Progressivism, and the general prosperity of the first decades of the twentieth century.² A new elite American civic culture was emerging.

Professional planners and active citizens alike held that clean streets, efficient sanitation services, and improved municipal services all made for a superior urban environment. The Progressive city itself would edify and ennoble its citizens. Across the country, cities sensed the need for what came to be known as the civic center: a collection of public buildings for government, education, arts, recreation, communal gatherings, and the like. In Philadelphia, an assembly of monumental public building types typical for the modern American metropolis—a “constellation of institutions”³—was to line the new diagonal route between City Hall (1879-1901) and the new Art Museum (1916-28). The Fairmount Parkway would become an “urban cultural center.”⁴

One of the structures considered for construction on the Parkway was a new type of public institution and, for that matter, a new architectural type as well. Proposals for a municipal convention hall formed a part of Parkway plans as early as 1910. Philadelphians perceived a need for a government owned and operated place where large-scale events, shows, and conventions could occur, and the most favored site for such a structure appeared to be the city's developing civic mile. For the next two decades, debates ensued about the dozens of proposals set forth for the erection of a municipal convention hall. As taxpayers and businessmen, politicians and architects wrestled with the logistics of location, design, and expense, they also struggled to understand how such an institution might best serve Philadelphia's interests.

☛ *City corrupt, contented, and beautiful*

In many American cities, Progressive reform programs represented a dramatic alternative to the corrupt machine politics of the second half of the 19th century. In *The Incorporation of America*, Alan Trachtenberg argued that the emerging "middle-class version of the city" required "an explanation of evil" wrought by the political machine and its beneficiaries.⁵ In Philadelphia, it was easy to vilify (but hard to punish) the entrenched Republican machine which "organized" the distribution of city contracts, perks, jobs, and public franchises to a confederation of immigrants, favored contractors, public transportation and utilities barons, railroad tycoons, and other business interests. Despite the efforts of the 1887 City Charter to increase the power of the mayor and to reorganize the nine city departments under his control, the unelected city boss remained the supreme ruler in Philadelphia.⁶ Famously branding Philadelphia "the most corrupt and the most contented" of municipal governments in 1903, muckraker Lincoln Steffens denigrated the city's reforms as "spasmodic efforts to punish bad rulers."⁷

In turn-of-the-century Philadelphia, it was difficult to determine whether such reform projects as the City Charter and the new water filtration system (1903) represented victories for virtuous citizens or venues for municipal boodle. Along with Progressives throughout the country, local reformers believed in scientific municipal administration and rational, comprehensive city planning; however, these ideas (and their proponents and programs) failed to attract consistent and widespread support in Philadelphia. Some reformers directed their attentions to the technical aspects of municipal governance and established the Bureau of Municipal Research in 1908 to “promote better government in Philadelphia by making scientific inquiries into the city’s government problems.”⁸ Others pursued reform projects through private groups like the women’s Civic Club, chartered “to regain for Philadelphia the leading rank it once occupied, and to restore to it the ground which its persistent conservatism has caused it to lose,” or the City Club of “men who wish to discuss the affairs of the city with a view to advancing its welfare.”⁹ Or they participated in the organization of the National Municipal League in 1894. The sturdy Republican organization weathered the small gains made by Progressives or, better still, adopted those reforms which suited its needs.¹⁰

Not only political professionals and private citizens, but also private businessmen often joined forces to effect civic reforms. Whereas the former groups often looked to scientific models for urban management, the latter group intended to run cities as they ran their businesses and corporations. They lobbied for an efficient and centralized government administration which coordinated public services, managed city resources, and invested in new infrastructure for maximum benefit. In *Dreaming the Rational City*, M. Christine Boyer argues that business interests recognized how city planning “could make trade and commerce easier to conduct in

the American city and thus indirectly promote capital accumulation and profitability.” She explains that by the turn of the century, chambers of commerce, merchants’ committees, and commercial clubs served as “unofficial advisers to the mayor and municipal administrations.”¹¹ In Philadelphia, these groups included the Board of Trade, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Committee of One Hundred. Philadelphia business interests also populated planning bodies such as the Comprehensive Plans Committee (1909) and the Fairmount Park Commission (1871).¹²

One of the Republican machine’s most outright abuses of power still can be read on Philadelphia’s urban landscape. During the years of machine dominance, favored builders and architects were awarded millions of dollars of government contracts for public infrastructure. Favored architects included father James (1840-1919) and son John T. Windrim (1866-1934) and Philip H. Johnson (1868-1933), who was appointed lifetime architect of the Department of Health by his brother-in-law, city boss Israel Durham. Subsequent city bosses “Sunny Jim” McNichol and the Vare brothers neatly transferred prime construction contracts to their own private building companies. Without question the most conspicuous monument to political graft and corruption was Philadelphia’s City Hall. Its siting on Center Square robbed citizens of the only major public open space in the downtown. With thick masonry walls decorated to imitate a Second Empire palace, this immense municipal building cost \$26 million and took forty years to construct. Its sheer bulk, unsurpassed height, and overwrought sculpture made for a dramatic reminder of the price Philadelphia paid for rotten, yet effective, machine governance.¹³

To return to Alan Trachtenberg’s argument, so too did the “evil” of cities’ physical fabric demand an antidote of reform-oriented building and planning programs. A mid-century example of this phenomenon took form in the parks

movement, for which landscape architects designed picturesque green spaces in direct contrast with congested, gridded, polluted cities. A visit to the park was intended to impart citizens with improved health and moral uplift. In a similar vein, proponents of the City Beautiful movement intended to prove that the city's fabric itself could transform citizens. Broad landscaped streets, carefully arranged monuments, and inspiring vistas counted among the more typical devices employed in City Beautiful planning. Contemporary architects' heavy use of neoclassical plans, forms, and ornamentation described a desire to revive the ideals of Roman and Greek empires and early Republican America—and at the same time imitated European currents. Ironically, the implementation of this movement to restore cities to their inhabitants often required the wholesale destruction of historic communities and institutions—a foreshadowing of the Urban Renewal movement of the 1950s. As the City Parks Association proclaimed in their 1913 *Annual Report*, "The Way to Build is to Tear Down."¹⁴

This motto describes the thrust of Philadelphia's most famous City Beautiful project. Like City Hall, the Fairmount Parkway (now the Benjamin Franklin Parkway) was conceived during the city's so-called "Iron Age."¹⁵ The idea to construct a diagonal boulevard linking City Hall with Fairmount Park was first publicized in 1871 but not ordained by Common Council until 1892. In 1907, the city initiated the demolition of buildings along the intended trajectory of the Parkway. As one might expect, the vagaries of political climate impeded consistent progress on the project. In the meantime, the idea of the Fairmount Parkway evolved from Fairmount accessway to landscaped civic center, and the project attracted a team of prominent architects trained in American offices and universities and at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris.¹⁶

In *Building the City Beautiful: The Benjamin Franklin Parkway and the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, architectural historian David Brownlee suggests that not until 1907 did contributing architects Paul Cret, Clarence Zantzinger, Charles Borie, and Horace Trumbauer give “first expression to this vision of a cultural boulevard.”¹⁷ Zantzinger credited Borie with the original idea to locate the Philadelphia Museum of Art on Fairmount and to cluster its school of art and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts below on Fairmount Plaza. By 1911, the Free Library, the Franklin Institute, the American Philosophical Society, the American Catholic Union, and the Medico-Chirurgical Hospital, and several educational institutions had expressed interest in occupying sites on the Parkway. Landscape architect Jacques Gréber’s 1917-19 Parkway plans would include other sites for courthouses, an Episcopal cathedral, and the Commercial Museum. In the various arrangements put forth over the Parkway’s design history, such institutions were to join those already on site, the Roman Catholic Cathedral and the Academy of Natural Sciences. As Gréber himself commented in 1918, the result would be “the creation of a real civic center.”¹⁸ Detractors might have argued that Philadelphia already boasted two linear civic centers extending from City Hall: Market Street’s commercial and transportation corridor and North and South Broad Street’s avenue of hotels, office buildings, and cultural and social institutions.¹⁹

One of the many buildings discussed for construction on the Parkway was a municipal convention hall (for list and map of sites considered, see *figs. 15-16*). As Mayor John Reyburn commented, “The Convention Hall. . .seems to have been the one thing that has been in everybody’s mind.”²⁰ In 1909, he organized a Comprehensive Plans Committee largely composed of the city’s leading businessmen. Their task, analogous to that of the creators of the 1909 Chicago Plan, was to devise “a comprehensive plan of action in the development of Philadelphia.”²¹ Within the

larger Committee, Reyburn created a Convention Hall Committee headed by Martin Brumbaugh, the superintendent of the Philadelphia Public Schools. The group spent two years studying precedents and debating the merits of various proposals. By 1910, the field had narrowed to two potential sites for the construction of a convention hall: one in East Fairmount Park just beyond the trajectory of the Parkway and another atop the Schuylkill River between Market and Chestnut Streets.²²

For West Philadelphia and Center City businessmen, the site spanning the Schuylkill presented a very appealing location for a convention hall. It was on all the major transportation lines; it saved the city the cost of purchasing land for the building. And importantly, as the *North American* reported in June 1910, "The novelty of a hall over the river will be an advertisement for the city." The firm of Ballinger and Perrot, known for their industrial and commercial architecture, designed a 320' x 190' rectangular structure two stories in height and surmounted by a dome (fig. 17). The first floor was to serve as an industrial showroom similar to that at the Bourse (see Chapter 1) with floor space available for rent to manufacturers and businessmen interested in displaying their products. Above, the auditorium was to seat a total of 18,400 people: 10,000 on the floor, 7000 in the balcony, and 1400 on the stage.²³

The architects solved the problem of access to the unusual site by arranging a series of driveways that linked the hall to the Market and Chestnut Street bridges to its north and south. A semicircular plaza was to provide a formal entrance from the east riverbank. The plans also called for improving the adjoining riverbanks with plantings, pergolas, and piers for recreational use. As a sign of endorsement, a number of businessmen's associations pledged \$920,000 towards the hall's \$1,920,000 price tag. The generous gesture demonstrated their confidence that the

convention hall would pay for itself within ten years and then turn over handsome profits to the city and its businesses.²⁴

Through the Ballinger and Perrot scheme, Philadelphia's downtown business interests envisioned a centrally-located convention hall that catered to visitors and benefited the local business community. They recognized that the financial success of a permanent facility depended on its capacity for mounting large-scale events and conventions that would attract out-of-town visitors to the city. Just by supplying and managing the facility, housing and feeding the visitors, downtown businesses could reap great profits. The Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia estimated that in 1917, the average convention-goer spent eight dollars each day he or she stayed in Philadelphia. This was a substantial sum, given that a night in a good hotel cost less than \$2. Another argument, also familiar among convention center boosters today, held that the presence of the convention hall would increase the value of privately-owned properties nearby.²⁵

To the dismay of the downtown businessmen, Mayor Reyburn favored Snyder's Woods (better known as "The Cliffs"). This site was meant to extend the Parkway's northwest trajectory deeper into Fairmount Park (*fig. 18*). Both pragmatic and dramatic, the location was bounded by Girard Avenue, 33rd Street, the Park Children's Playground, and the Schuylkill River, and it was near the intersection of the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroads. The task of developing plans fell to John Windrim, whose father James was the sole architect on the Comprehensive Plans Committee. Because the site was located within Park boundaries, the Fairmount Park Commissioners had to approve the plans, which they did in November 1910.²⁶

John Windrim presented a tremendous fifty-six acre recreational complex, which he called the "Grand Assembly Center" (also known by the site's name "The Cliffs"). His plans included a stadium, aviation and athletic field, musical coliseum,

auditorium, water gate, and space for an arboretum (*fig. 19*). The convention hall (auditorium) was to be the largest in the world, measuring 624' x 450'. It was to seat 15,000 people on three levels and an additional 3500 on the massive stage. When he devised a system of "inclined planes" for a fireproof and "panic-proof" auditorium, Windrim probably had in mind crowd circulation at large athletic stadiums such as the Philadelphia Athletics' new Shibe Park (1909). Windrim specified light gray brick and terra cotta (to imitate limestone) to cover the steel frame and a dome of copper, bronze, and glass to surmount the main hall—not unlike Memorial Hall across the Schuylkill River. The architect described this combination of classically-derived forms and rich ornamentation as "modern Renaissance."²⁷

The Windrim proposal offered a distinct interpretation of the project: convention hall as recreational and ceremonial gathering place. In a speech to a meeting of the Comprehensive Plans Committee, Reyburn expressed his expectations for a populist Grand Assembly Centre:

Now, after all, the question was whether we should merely have a hall where a few people could get together—we will say eight thousand or ten thousand people—or whether we should have a great place where the whole citizenship of Philadelphia could assemble. Now, where was that place? . . . The name of that place, since the time of Penn, has been "The Cliffs," and there are fifty-six acres of it, and we can build there not only a great Convention Hall, but, as I have said, a great place for the assemblage of the whole people of Philadelphia. I do not mean, of course, the whole million five hundred and fifty thousand, but they can go there day after day and have a place such as there does not exist in the world for their assembling; where they can have all the amusements of all kinds; where there could be, we will say, a great State Fair—not horse racing so much, not things of that kind, but where a great mechanical and agricultural exhibition could be held with the greatest facility that could be given in any place in the United States.

In the same speech, Reyburn explained that the Committee specifically studied state fairgrounds as models for the convention hall complex.²⁸ Fairground architecture included numerous temporary pavilions as well as great utilitarian structures (such as arenas and exhibition buildings) that could weather the off-months. Every year, the fairs attracted millions of fairgoers to examine the latest goods, produce, and

achievements that the state had to offer.²⁹ Mayor Reyburn similarly intended for the Grand Assembly Centre to be a site of popular achievement and entertainment, but on a municipal scale. Another influence on "The Cliffs" may have been San Francisco's Civic Center, part of which was constructed in time for the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition.³⁰ The Grand Assembly Centre, the state fairgrounds, and the Civic Center all embodied the notion that a given polity should have its own ceremonial spaces and structures for communal gathering.

The Convention Hall Committee sought to link the proposed complex at "The Cliffs" with the developing Fairmount Parkway. In some respects, the Grand Assembly Centre might have made a more apt terminus for the Parkway (and a more popular destination) than the proposed Art Museum. At the very least, the complex represented a contributing feature to the Parkway's extended civic center. A statement made by the Committee auspiciously claimed:

While the convention hall committee had nothing to do with the laying out of improvements along the line of the Parkway, the members have always felt that when the Art Gallery and other institutions, places of amusement, educational institutions, etc. are located on the Parkway, it will become the Mecca for thousands of visitors to the city, and that when a convention or great assemblage is held in this city that avenue will be thronged with people making their way to the convention hall.³¹

The complex's location within the Park and its recreational facilities would appeal more to parkgoers on a day's excursion than to conventioners trekking at least two miles from their downtown hotels, restaurants, and train stations. Notably, Windrim did not emphasize business-oriented features in his program for "The Cliffs." The Convention Hall Committee's report listed "Permanent Exhibition" of local manufactures as the last major factor to be considered after education, athletics, music, and "Aquatic Sports and Water Fetes."³²

Despite Mayor Reyburn's preference of "The Cliffs," proponents of "The Bridge" organized a Town Meeting Convention Hall Committee and launched a

massive campaign for their site. Under the leadership of the president of the Walnut Street Business Association, they assembled their own task force of allied businessmen's organizations, secured the names of at least 30,000 voters on a "monster petition," and attempted to quiet the skeptics with engineers' endorsements of the hall's structural integrity. The mayor refused to meet with the Committee as a result of one of their more obnoxious stunts: the mass distribution of postcards bearing such comments as "The bridge site means business for business men, the Snyder's Woods site means business for?" and "Call Snyder's Woods by any other name it's snide woods just the same."³³

Mayor Reyburn steadfastly lobbied for the Grand Assembly Center during his last year in office (1911). By the end of March, it appeared that "The Cliffs" had edged "The Bridge." Both branches of Councils appropriated \$50,000 for the preparation of plans and specifications and the initial construction of "a convention hall in East Fairmount Park, north of Girard Avenue."³⁴ That spring, six sheets of drawings depicting the Windrim complex were displayed in City Hall for the "First Municipal City Planning Exhibition in America" held in conjunction with the Third Annual City Planning Conference. The plans met with Councils' approval in the fall, voters approved a \$1.5 million loan, and the \$4.43 million/four-and-a-half year contract went to the Charles McCaul Company in October.³⁵

The mayor hoped that at least the auditorium would open in time to welcome the 23rd National Saengerfest of the Nord Oestliche Saengerbund of America in June 1912. Cities in the mid-Atlantic states began sponsoring these great gatherings of German choruses in the 1850's. Because of the large number of singers (in the thousands) and audience members (also in the thousands), the events were held outdoors or in arenas constructed for the purpose. As the birthplace of America's first formal German singing society, the Maennerchor (1835), Philadelphia won the

honor of hosting the 1912 Saengerfest. It was no coincidence that one of the organizers of the festival, president Henry Detreux of the United German Singers of Philadelphia, served on the Convention Hall Committee. To the mayor's disappointment, the scale and expense of the project made the rapid construction of the massive complex impossible. He arranged instead for the builders to clear the site, lay the permanent foundations, and erect a temporary wood auditorium for the upcoming event.³⁶

This more modest project was foiled by a taxpayers' suit—a judicial tool which enabled ordinary citizens to check what they considered to be unreasonable government activities. In November 1911, five citizens claimed that the \$1.5 million loaned to the city had been specified for a permanent building, the total cost of which was not to exceed that sum. When the Common Pleas Court killed the project by deciding in favor of the taxpayers, Reyburn described his opponents as “narrow-waisted and narrow-minded.”³⁷ He knew well that the fiercest opposition to “The Cliffs” was not spendthrift taxpayers but Philadelphia business interests. Taxpayers' suits, businessmen's protests, and other conflicts of interest would dog the project for the next twenty years. At the very least, outgoing mayor John Reyburn succeeded in planting the idea of the convention hall in the imagination of his populace.

☛ *Old Convention Hall*

Dissension among the Republicans allowed the independent Keystone Party to elect merchant-reformer Rudolph Blankenburg mayor in 1911. The “Old Dutch Cleanser” had a outstanding reputation in Progressive circles, and his inaugural address promised a nonpartisan administration with qualified professionals heading each of the city departments. He endorsed Reyburn's city planning efforts by authorizing the Comprehensive Plans Committee, and he appointed a fellow reformer

as Director of Public Works. Industrial engineer Morris L. Cooke was a disciple of Frederick Winslow Taylor and a proponent of scientific management in city administration. He restaffed the Department of Public Works with technical experts, modernized office routine, and cleaned up the bidding and contracting process. Historian Lloyd Abernethy points out that Blankenburg's greatest successes were of an administrative nature, but that he encountered difficulties pushing legislative reforms through the machine-dominated Councils. As a result, progress on the Parkway slowed substantially, and the grandiose plans for a permanent recreational complex on the banks of the Schuylkill were abandoned.³⁸

Regardless, Philadelphia did have to provide some sort of structure to house the upcoming Saengerfest, and Blankenburg had promised a temporary convention hall during campaign. On 9 January 1912, the mayor announced that he had arranged financing for the project. The City would provide \$100,000, and Drexel and Company chief E.T. Stotesbury advanced \$50,000 to be reimbursed by the Saengerfest proceeds. The city entered a five-year lease for a site on the northeast corner of Broad Street and Allegheny Avenue (now the site of the Temple University School of Dentistry). In the 1910s, the rapidly expanding North Penn neighborhoods were home to thousands of working class families and a number of entertainment and recreational facilities. On a rainy day in late February, a crowd of 4000 gathered to watch the mayor wield a silver-plated, ribboned spade and break ground for Philadelphia's first Convention Hall.³⁹

Architect Carl P. Berger (1873-1947) was a logical choice to design a grand shelter for the Saengerfest. He was the son of a German stage and theater designer, a member of the German Society of Pennsylvania, and a singer in two choruses, the Maennerchor and the Junger Maennerchor. Berger had erected several theatres and halls for the German-American community, including the New German Theatre (1905)

and Liederkranz Hall (1907) for the singing society of the same name. His portfolio of works also included warehouses, factories, and a movie theatre.⁴⁰

The *Evening Bulletin* marveled at the “Mushroom-Like Rapidity” with which the structure was erected. Employing the same construction technique as world’s fair pavilions and other temporary structures, the builders erected a massive wood frame and covered it with yellow and white cement plaster. By the end of June, the steady night and day work resulted in a structure measuring 265’ x 408’ (fig. 20). Inside the hall, the exposed roof structure, wood columns, concrete floor, and scattered small electric light fixtures made for a warehouse-like atmosphere (fig. 21). The auditorium accommodated 19,301 persons: 6000 performers on a raised stage, 8555 audience members on the main floor, and another 4746 in the balcony. The exterior was a giant box with the long, flat expanse of its side walls divided into panels marked by a series of clerestory windows, shallow pilasters, and doors. Berger decorated the front facade in a “Colonial scheme” perhaps characterized by the six swag ornaments affixed to the wall and a projecting, pedimented portico serving as the main entrance. In the portico’s frieze appeared the following epigrammatic inscription: “WHERE THERE IS NO VISION THE PEOPLE PERISH.”⁴¹

Blankenburg’s vision was limited to a “semi-permanent” structure to last five years at best. Immediately after the Saengerfest closed, the mayor’s administration decided to make the Convention Hall available to private firms for yearly lease. When only one company made a bid (at \$1000, it was \$9000 less than the minimum bid expected by the mayor), the city withdrew the offer. The administration instead instituted a rental fee schedule similar to that developing at the Commercial Museum. It cost groups \$500 per night to rent the hall if admission were charged and \$250 if the admission were free. This arrangement situated the city as owner-manager of a desirable (though not heated and not fireproof) gathering place.⁴²

As the government representative responsible for the Convention Hall, the Superintendent of City Real Estate loosely interpreted the fee structure but generally adhered to its rationale. A local newspaper reported that in addition to the Philadelphia Band's weekly Thursday night concerts, the following rentals took place in 1915:

- March 13—Annual carnival of the Meadowbrook Club. Rental \$100.
- May 5 and 6—Police carnival. No charge.
- May 8—Women's pageant for benefit of vacation fund. Rental \$100.
- May 10—Reception to alien citizens by Mayor Blankenburg. No charge.
- May 18—Musical festival by Sunday School Association. Rental \$500.
- May 25—Knights Templar Ball. Rental \$100.
- October 5—Fireman's drill. No charge.
- October 8 to 15—Scoreboard for championship ball games. Rental \$100 a day.
- October 21 and 22—Philadelphia Sunday Schools with Lincoln chorus. Rental of \$250 or \$500, undetermined.
- Nine Saturday nights in September and October, concluding October 30, by the Stone Men. Rental \$100 a night.

This list reflects the range of interest groups and special events utilizing the structure. Convention Hall served as a "semi-permanent" municipal institution of a semi-public nature. Though government uses took precedent, the large-scale formal space was one that private citizens could make their own, if only for a night. Unlike the Commercial Museum, which was typically rented to formal trade shows during the 1910s, the Convention Hall at Broad and Allegheny functioned much like a contemporary community center.⁴³

The temporary Convention Hall survived the Blankenburg administration (1911-15), which seemed content with the modest success of the building. It earned the city \$18,500 in rentals by 1917, and it stifled agitation for a permanent convention facility for a few years. Soon after Philadelphia returned to machine rule under Republican Mayor Thomas B. Smith in 1915, Councils arranged for the old "firetrap" on the corner of Broad and Allegheny to be razed. The demolition was completed on 6 June 1917. During its brief life-span, the old Convention Hall hosted

dozens of community events and counted among its many guests Presidents William Howard Taft and Woodrow Wilson. Perhaps the hastily constructed wood frame building was not itself a point of civic pride, but it did house many social functions of a diverse urban audience.⁴⁴

➤ *Schemes for a permanent convention hall*

Even before the temporary convention hall was demolished, business concerns and government officials revived the efforts to erect a permanent convention hall in 1915. Mayor Blankenburg directed his Director of Public Works to represent the administration on these matters. With the backing of many of the former supporters of “the Bridge,” Morris Cooke arranged the purchase of a property bounded by Market, 24th, and Chestnut Streets and the Schuylkill River. Proponents pictured a two-story structure with an auditorium arranged above an exhibition hall on the approximately 445’ x 275’ lot. On 26 March, Cooke boasted that “From almost every standpoint—size, location, price and general availability, this is undoubtedly the best site that has thus far been suggested for the great municipal convention and exhibition hall, for which approximately \$1,500,00 is now available.”⁴⁵

Cooke’s statement immediately provoked a dispute over the appropriate site for the new convention hall. Representing the northwest part of the city, the United Business Men’s Association organized to oppose the ordinance that would authorize the \$330,000 purchase; their group (as well as the Board of Trade) desired “The Cliffs” complex to be built in Fairmount Park. Meanwhile, the Allied Business Men’s Association on Convention Hall, composed mostly of organizations from the central city as well as larger organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, prepared arguments on behalf of the “central” site. By the time of the public hearing regarding the purchase, a small group was backing a third site near the Parkway, bounded by 24th, 25th, and Green Streets and Pennsylvania and Fairmount Avenues.⁴⁶

On 26 April, the Select Council's Finance Committee convened at City Hall to hear arguments on behalf of the three locations. Each faction offered a different interpretation of how this new building, the municipal convention hall, would serve Philadelphia. Former attorney general Hampton L. Carson appeared on behalf of the "central" site. He was presently engaged as the lawyer to the owners of the Rittenhouse Hotel (at 22nd and Chestnut Streets), and he argued the downtown businessman's perspective:

Can't you see that it would be better to draw all sections of the city together to a common heart [in the 7th-10th wards], from which there shall be pumped out streams of prosperity to all the city? . . . This is a business proposition, not an artistic dream. The location of a convention hall should not be made to depend upon beautiful scenery and artistic surroundings. . . . A building of this nature should be available for all sorts of assembles [*sic*] and displays, much more than is comprehended by the title 'convention hall.'

He also underlined the risk in allowing "a commission you can't control or direct to the slightest degree" (the Fairmount Park Commission) to supervise the construction and operation of the hall. Wearing badges reading "For the Cliffs," that delegation disparaged the "few centrally located merchants who want to boom their own little businesses." Finally, a third party contended that a convention hall was a municipal institution, and as such it should join the others planned to line the Parkway.⁴⁷

Although the Select Council did not express favor of any particular site, it all but killed the Snyder's Woods bid by refusing the transfer of Convention Hall funds to the Fairmount Park Commission that May. By June, the field of convention hall sites had widened to four, with another location proposed on the Parkway at 21st, 22nd, and Hamilton Streets (now occupied by the Rodin Museum). As his term of office drew to a close in the fall of 1915, Mayor Blankenburg took a diplomatic position and announced that he favored "either one of three sites": 24th and Chestnut, Green Street and the Parkway, or Broad and Allegheny (where the temporary convention hall had stood).⁴⁸

The new Republican mayor, Thomas B. Smith, took a much more active role in efforts to erect a convention hall in the city. Brownlee suggests that Smith's alliances with contractors helped "foster a favorable attitude toward all public works projects."⁴⁹ With a \$9 million loan, Smith reenergized Parkway construction and included among the improvements the erection of a Convention Hall on the Parkway between 21st and 22nd Streets (land owned by the city). An ordinance of 18 February 1916 allowed him to engage John T. Windrim to prepare plans for a building with the \$1.5 million that had been available since the 1911 "Cliffs" project.⁵⁰

Assisted by John F. Harbeson (of Cret's office), Windrim prepared designs for a magnificent octagonal structure which he described as "Roman Classic" (*fig. 22*). Entirely faced with limestone, the building was to rise from a coursed ashlar basement twenty-five feet above street level. There were to be three large porticoes, the front one supporting a pediment ornamented with an allegorical sculpture group depicting the history of Philadelphia. The rear (north) of the building was to feature a railroad loading dock. The floor plans were much more specialized than those of previous examples. Inside the basement, the architects arranged a restaurant, restrooms, emergency hospital, communications services, and a mechanical plant. A total of 15,000 people could sit in the 225' x 225' auditorium and its two galleries beneath the 235' high ceiling. When not in use as an auditorium, this great space could double as an exhibition area. The first gallery level also was to contain an auditorium seating 1000, and the second gallery level featured three 400-person, two 300-person, and eight committee rooms. From his "Cliffs" design, Windrim revived the system of inclined planes for mass circulation.⁵¹

When he released the plans to the public in mid-July, Director of Public Works George E. Datesman listed large space, flexible arrangement, and modern conveniences as the key factors in convention hall design. Furthermore, he noted how

the proposed convention hall contributed to the larger context of the Parkway:

This magnificent avenue will be completed with funds provided by the people at the recent election and several important buildings will be erected thereon. the proposed Convention Hall, therefore must conform in dignity to the Free library and the Art Museum. No location can be more favorable than the Parkway location on account of its convenience to the central part of the city and the necessity for embellishing an avenue, which costs so much to construct, with dignified buildings. This will make the Parkway an avenue which compares very favorably, if it will not excel in beauty and dignity, with the famous Unter den Linden in Berlin, King's Way in London, a portion of the Ring Strasse in Vienna, and the famous Champs Elysée in Paris.⁵²

The publication of the planned Convention Hall even captured national attention.

The *Public Ledger* reported that within two weeks Mayor Smith was already receiving numerous rental requests and inviting groups to hold their conventions in Philadelphia. The city's Art Jury considered the project for a month before they endorsed it in September 1916.⁵³

Despite the administration's zeal, the project was toppled by yet another taxpayer's suit. In a case that went to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, citizen Henry Raff contended that the city engaged in \$2.25 million of contracts for the hall, when the public had authorized only \$1.52 million. The Court's prevailing opinion concluded that "If the convention hall cannot be erected with the moneys now available for it, its erection must be deferred until it can be erected without breach of faith toward those who authorized the increase of indebtedness for that purpose."⁵⁴

The decision dealt the mayor a significant setback. Already having scheduled the demolition of the old convention hall at Broad and Allegheny, Smith designated the Commercial Museum's Grand Exhibition Hall as the new "temporary." Then he turned to Windrim for a more modest design within the available budget. The architect responded with an austere rectangular box with a single portico centered in front (fig. 23). The interior featured one 6000-person auditorium and, as expressed by a press release by the Department of Public Works, "only such other services as

are absolutely essential.” The release further explained that any events requiring exhibition space could also rent the facilities at the Commercial Museum which were “but ten minutes run by automobile” from the proposed convention hall.⁵⁵

The scaled-back hall drew a negative response from business interests. Chamber of Commerce president Ernest T. Trigg suggested shelving the project until more funds were raised and then consulting local businessmen about the building’s plans. “The business men know what is needed as to size of the building the various rooms and so on,” stated Trigg, “for most conventions are composed of business men.”⁵⁶ In withdrawing the latest proposal, Mayor Smith expressed his pleasure that Philadelphia business interests, the Fairmount Park Commission, and the Art Jury could concur that “a large auditorium, or none at all, should be erected on the Parkway.”⁵⁷ It was a significant achievement to reach even a negative agreement between such disparate interests.

➤ *More schemes for a permanent convention hall*

Work on the Parkway proceeded during World War I, though the drive to erect a convention hall had largely dissipated with the defeat of the latest Windrim proposal. Brownlee suggests that landscape architect Gréber’s greener vision of the Parkway impeded efforts to erect a convention hall there. “Gréber’s vision of a wedge of park,” he writes, “replaced the concept of a boulevard.”⁵⁸ Although the plan for a convention hall faded during the war years, it was by no means dropped. Yet another round of impressive plans and crippling indecision marked the next decade in the genesis of Philadelphia’s convention hall.

To borrow from Hampton L. Carson’s 1915 speech (see pages 45-46), the convention hall was about business, not art. It was also about politics. In 1919, the political climate shifted once again towards reform. A new city charter went into effect that year. Based on research supplied by the Bureau of Municipal Services, the

new charter intended to rationalize Philadelphia's government. Its features included the institution of a one-house City Council, the provision for the city to provide its own streets services, stricter civil service regulations, and a new annual schedule for the mayor's budget. Also, the new mayor was a political independent whose credentials included reporting for the *Public Ledger* and working for decades as a professional politician. J. Hampton Moore had campaigned against the "contractor rule" imposed by the Vare organization and also promised to unburden the city of any undeveloped, superfluous real estate. Clearly Mayor Moore was not as public works-friendly a mayor as his predecessor.⁵⁹

Nonetheless, in a speech delivered just a week after his election, Moore promised both a national commercial museum on the Parkway and a "great convention hall. . .which will not be a continual expense to the municipality when it is not in use."⁶⁰ On at least two occasions during his mayoral tenure preliminary plans were drawn up for a convention hall on the Parkway; however, these designs failed to progress beyond the city architect's drawing board. Mayor Moore sorely lacked the backing of the business interests and the Republican machine; it would take a better "organized" mayor to erect a convention hall.⁶¹

Two national developments gave new direction to Philadelphia's efforts to gain a convention hall. First of all, the loss of American soldiers suffered during the First World War inspired many communities to create some sort of permanent memorial. These tributes took many forms, from planting memorial oak trees to dedicating soldiers' monuments to constructing Victory Halls. The latter were typically large public auditoriums inscribed with the names of those sacrificed or the battles in which they fought. The appearance of Victory Halls (or Veterans' Auditoriums) in hundreds of American communities obliged the larger cities to erect their own. Moreover, the demand for these Victory Halls encouraged contemporary

architects to distill the various current interpretations of the municipal auditorium into a distinctive building type.⁶²

The second occurrence was the completion and attendant success of Cleveland's convention hall in 1922. Like Philadelphia, Cleveland first realized the need for a convention hall in 1874, when it had to build a temporary hall to host the National Saengerfest. An Exhibition and People's House as well as a Music Hall had formed part of the city's 1903 Group Plan of public buildings. Due to financial complications and the interruption posed by WWI, construction of the Public Auditorium did not commence until 1920. Two years later, the designs of Cleveland architects J. Harold MacDowell and Frank R. Walker were complete. With a main auditorium seating 13,000 and a large basement exhibition hall, the building was the largest, finest, and most sought after American convention hall of the 1920s (*fig. 24*). The limestone walls of the "Italian Renaissance" building was inscribed with its public role as a "MONUMENT CONCEIVED AS A TRIBUTE TO THE IDEALS OF CLEVELAND, BUILDED BY HER CITIZENS AND DEDICATED TO SOCIAL PROGRESS, INDUSTRIAL ACHIEVEMENTS AND CIVIC INTEREST." In June 1924, thousands of press members and Republican delegates journeyed to the Public Auditorium to attend the Republican National Convention, and many returned home with the vision of building their communities convention halls as grand as Cleveland's.⁶³

Philadelphia followed suit. An *Evening Bulletin* columnist reporting from the Republican Convention commented that the Philadelphia delegates "freely admitted a bit of envy of the Ohio city in its possession of a magnificent Public Hall."⁶⁴ Nonetheless, divergent conceptions of how a public arena should serve the city made agreement on any project near impossible. Veterans' groups and public-minded interests lobbied for a Victory Hall to provide a dedicated space for public memory

and municipal gathering. Philadelphia businessmen—and at different locations throughout the city—continued to rally for a larger structure that could accommodate trade and industrial exhibits as well as national conventions. Meanwhile, demand also grew for a municipal stadium (or complex like “The Cliffs”) that could serve Philadelphia’s grander recreational needs.

Funding was available for a Victory Hall. On 17 March 1921, a state act had authorized Pennsylvania counties to erect memorial halls to honor their war dead. That November, Philadelphia citizens voted \$8.5 million in favor of such an expenditure, and the following year, the County Commissioners appointed a committee to organize an architectural competition for a Victory Hall. More than eighty firms submitted preliminary proposals. These ranged from a \$4 million Building for Military Organizations with auditorium (for 2400), offices, and exhibition hall to a \$15 million Community Center complex that included a Festival Hall (for 4200); concert, music, and banquet halls; offices for military organizations; and an exhibition space. These initial submissions allowed the committee to settle on a location (on the block bounded by 20th, Race, 21st, and Winter Streets) and prepare for the formal competition in 1924 (now occupied by the Franklin Institute).⁶⁵

Warren P. Laird, the Dean of the School of Fine Arts of the University of Pennsylvania, served as the project’s architectural adviser. He had organized competitions for municipal auditoriums and Victory Halls in nine other eastern cities.⁶⁶ A draft of Philadelphia’s competition program collected in Laird’s records eloquently expresses the civic purpose of a Victory Hall:

The aim of the project is to render to patriotic valor a tribute in a form of perpetual public usefulness. Thus the building should make practical provision for the serve of the public and do this in a manner expressive of the motive behind the act; in a form whose dignity and sentiment shall express the respect and gratitude of a community towards its defenders.⁶⁷

The roster of participants invited to submit proposals for the competition reads almost like a *Who's Who* of Philadelphia architects: Paul Cret; Day and Klauder and De Armand, Ashmead and Brickley Associates; Wilson Eyre and McIlvaine; Furness, Evans and Company and Welling, Sims and Talbot Associates; Mellor, Meigs and Howe; Rankin, Kellogg and Crane; Simon and Simon; Horace Trumbauer; and Zantzinger, Borie and Medary. Threats of a taxpayer's suit, debates about appropriate siting, and tension between the County Commissioners and city officials delayed the formal announcement of the competition.⁶⁸

Still, enough pieces should have been in place to realize the project. The 1923 elections had placed a more "organized" mayor, W. Freeland Kendrick, back in City Hall. Backed by the Vares and sympathetic to businessmen, Kendrick facilitated major public works projects such as the Sesqui-Centennial Exposition and the Broad Street Subway. Perhaps the mayor was too eager to please each of the competing interest groups. In November 1924, he favored a complex (in Upper Darby) consisting of a 100,000-seat stadium and two auditoriums for 5000 people and 10,000 people respectively—as well as a Victory Hall seating 2000 (on the Parkway). A small, "vest-pocket" Victory Hall, however, angered both veterans' groups and commercial interests. A cartoon published in the *Public Ledger* expressed the outrageousness of building a 2000 seat hall for \$4 million (*fig. 25*).⁶⁹

Despite public disapproval, the mayor continued to campaign for a smaller Victory Hall. That December, he was urging a 15,000-seat convention hall (on the Schuylkill at Spring Garden and 25th Streets), a stadium (at Hunting Park), and a Victory Hall. By diverting \$4.5 million of the funds intended for the Victory Hall, explained the mayor, "We will get two buildings for the price of one."⁷⁰ In 1925, Kendrick attempted to "banish the hoodoo" surrounding the convention hall project. He proposed grafting together the Victory Hall and the convention hall as a hybrid

“utilitarian memorial Victory Hall” on the Parkway.⁷¹ He also considered uniting the Municipal Court and the convention hall in a single megastructure.⁷²

The County Commissioners’ competition for the Victory Hall was never formally announced. A series of delays effectively canceled the competition by the fall of 1925. Further research may determine if any of the nine competitors actually prepared entries. At least Paul Cret was tinkering with a design for the building in 1925 (*fig. 26*). By replicating the exterior of Trumbauer’s Free Library, Cret suggested that a Victory Hall was indistinguishable from other monumental municipal building types. In fact, he continued to reproduce the shell of the library building in his designs for the Benjamin Franklin Memorial in 1927. Probably he was less concerned with devising a sensitive program for a particular institution than with insuring the overall agreement of buildings on the Parkway.⁷³

This certainly was the case in July 1926, when local newspapers published the city architect’s proposal for a combined convention hall and municipal court building—even before the designs had won the endorsement of the Art Jury. As a member of the Art Jury and a consulting architect for the Fairmount Parkway, Cret was incensed. He wrote to fellow Art Jury member John Frederick Lewis that the proposal was “by far the worst scheme suggested so far.” Moreover, he wrote, “The plan is not only childish from the point of view of city planning, but it jeopardizes that development of the Parkway along the lines maintained so far through the efforts of all comparable bodies in the city.”⁷⁴

The published proposal showed the convention hall and the Municipal Court building squeezed together on the same block. The former was to front on the Parkway at 21st Street and the latter to front on Race Street. Copying the interior configuration of Cleveland’s Public Auditorium, architect John Molitor’s design featured an exhibition hall at basement level, an auditorium seating 15,000 with 7000

at ground level and 8000 in the balcony, and meeting rooms of varying size distributed along the periphery. The long, low building was to be decorated in a blandly classical manner that Molitor called “Roman Renaissance” (*fig. 27*). Its primary feature was to be a continuous colonnade that stretched from the entry portico along the primary facade and around the flanking side pavilions. A single row of windows set between the columns also emphasized the broad, continuous front. Molitor arranged a courtyard between the convention hall and the 3-story “Florentine Renaissance” court building.⁷⁵

Despite the Art Jury’s aesthetic concerns and Councilmen’s worries about the mounting cost of the Sesqui-Centennial Exposition and the need for city-wide street improvements, Kendrick vowed, “The Convention Hall will be built[,] and I am going to start right now to finish the program.”⁷⁶ In late July, he announced some slight alterations in the design for convention hall, construction of which was intended to commence that fall. Following Gréber’s suggestion, Molitor beveled one corner of the proposed structure in order to preserve the contour of what would become Logan Circle. Also, the basement exhibition area was to be increased from 60,000 to 100,000 square feet by excavating additional space beneath the sidewalks.⁷⁷

The doubting Councilmen were right. Even such an industrious and connected mayor as W. Freeland Kendrick could not justify the construction of a \$5.3 million convention hall when the Sesqui itself would run a \$5 million deficit. In fact, that project was marked by a similar struggle over similar issues of siting, program, design, cost, audience, business sponsorship, and municipal purpose. A brief examination of these factors should provide insight into the working relationship between Philadelphia’s business and political interests. In several ways, the ten-year evolution of the Sesqui-Centennial Exposition foreshadowed the twenty-year evolution of Philadelphia’s Convention Hall.

In 1916, merchant John Wanamaker suggested that the City of Philadelphia hold an international exhibition in honor of the nation's 150th birthday. In the early 1920s, the celebration was linked to the Parkway project. Planners recommended that instead of building another temporary world's fair city of plaster of Paris and chicken wire, Philadelphia should erect substantial masonry buildings of lasting public value.⁷⁸ In 1922, Mayor Moore submitted that a Fairmount Park and Parkway location for the fair would "forward the construction of the great permanent and much-needed buildings already planned for the Parkway."⁷⁹ At least fourteen different locations were deliberated through 1925. The scales were probably tipped towards a South Philadelphia site when machine boss William S. Vare arranged for the construction of the expensive new Municipal Stadium at Broad and Pattison Streets. In fact, Vare scored a quadruple coup for his South Philadelphia constituency: the stadium site ensured the location of the Sesqui just across the street at Broad and Packer, as well as street improvements, the southward extension of the Broad Street Subway, and the installation of electrical and plumbing lines on the fairgrounds and in adjacent areas.⁸⁰

The political machine's interest in spending a lot of money in South Philadelphia was buttressed by the business community's interest in advertising Philadelphia's service, commercial, and manufacturing facilities. Aware of the financial promise of such an enormous fair, real estate baron Albert M. Greenfield raised \$1 million on its behalf. He was not only a member of the Sesqui-Centennial's Board of Directors, but also the chair of the Chamber of Commerce's newly reorganized Bureau of Conventions and Exhibitions. That group intended to attract as many conventions as possible to Philadelphia in 1926 to attend the Sesqui, patronize local businesses, and consider Philadelphia as a convention location. A perceived demand, they reasoned, should encourage the city to realize its plans to

erect a permanent convention hall specifically for business and professional activities.⁸¹

By most accounts, the Sesqui-Centennial Exposition was a flop. Though the event opened on time on 31 May, one third of the exhibits were not yet mounted, many roads not yet paved, and several buildings not yet completed. An unusually rainy six months kept attendance figures at a 6.4 million, though ambitious organizers had predicted 40 million. The layout of the fair was unremarkable, as was the bulk of the architecture that lined its paths. Perhaps a sign of their conservatism, most audiences preferred the walkable reproduction of "Old High Street" to the mildly modernistic, rainbow-colored "setback" buildings housing contemporary exhibits and functions.⁸²

Even if the era of great international expositions bypassed the 1920s, a new popular civic culture was on the rise. The expansion of manufacturing output, the increase in wage earners' purchasing power, and the rise of advertising all contributed to a consumer society in which leisure was a key commodity. Americans could purchase fun at movie theaters and athletic stadiums, in hobby shops and car showrooms. More Americans could take vacations to seaside resorts and state and national parks and forests. In *The Emergence of Metropolitan America, 1915-1966*, Blake McKelvey comments that the boomtowns of the 1920s were resort towns and recreational centers like Atlantic City and St. Petersburg. Even in the older cities, private interests invested in amusement parks and theaters, while governments improved recreational facilities like parks, pools, and athletic fields. American mass audiences were hungry for entertainment and recreation.⁸³

While the Sesqui failed as an international event in and of itself, it succeeded as a showcase of events of national and local scale. A crowd of 120,757 assembled in the Municipal Stadium to watch Gene Tunney outbox Jack Dempsey to win the

heavyweight boxing title. Sports enthusiasts watched everything from archery to tennis at the summer's "Sesqui-Centennial Games." Up to 20,000 spectators at a time gathered to watch a wide variety of events, from musical pageants to dog shows, in the versatile, steel frame and stucco Auditorium Building (*fig. 28*). And as Greenfield and the Chamber of Commerce intended, national and state organizations found Philadelphia a very appealing convention destination in 1926. Almost two hundred groups—from the American Association of Engineers to the Pennsylvania State Spiritualists Association, from the Boy Brigades of America to the Daughters of the American Revolution—held meetings in the city and attended the Sesqui-Centennial during its May-November season.⁸⁴

Philadelphia could and did attract major conventions, exhibits, sports events, and cultural happenings, but it took an extravagant world's fair and a \$5 million debt to do so. Moreover it required the Chamber of Commerce to take more prominent advisory and leadership roles. Reflecting on its achievements at the Sesqui and its work of the past year, the Chamber's Bureau of Conventions and Exhibitions vowed to pursue the "urgent request"⁸⁵ for a permanent convention hall. The past fifteen years had taught some difficult lessons as to which features appealed to which constituencies. It seemed that the permanent convention hall would necessarily embody the excitement of the world's fair or significant event and the dignity of a cherished municipal institution. From its legacy of proposals and "temporaries" and its limited knowledge of other examples of this very young building type, Philadelphia was at last prepared to construct its own municipal convention hall.

Endnotes: Chapter 2

¹ Charles B. Hall, as quoted in "No Delay On Hall, Council Head Says," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* (hereafter *EB*), 2 Jul. 1916.

- ² M. Christine Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 44.
- ³ David Brownlee, *Building the City Beautiful: The Benjamin Franklin Parkway and the Philadelphia Museum of Art* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1989), 71.
- ⁴ Cyrus Dezfuli-Arjomandi, "Benjamin Franklin Parkway in Philadelphia: A Study of the Forces behind its Creation and Evolution" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1985), 99.
- ⁵ Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture & Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982), 107.
- ⁶ Nathaniel Burt and Wallace E. Davies, "The Iron Age, 1876-1905" in *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*, ed. Russell F. Weigley (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), 496-97.
- ⁷ Lincoln Steffens, *The Shame of the Cities* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957), 136-37.
- ⁸ "A few facts about the Bureau of Municipal Research of Philadelphia," ca. 1928, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter HSP).
- ⁹ Sara Stevenson, "Address," *Annual Report of the Civic Club* (1), 1894, 3; "Editorial," *City Club Bulletin* I, no. 1 (21 Oct. 1910): 3.
- ¹⁰ Charles N. Glaab and A. Theodore Brown, *A History of Urban America* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 193.
- ¹¹ Boyer, *Dreaming*, 121-23.
- ¹² Sam Bass Warner, Jr. *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of its Growth* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 206-08.
- ¹³ Lloyd Abernethy, "Progressivism: 1905-1919," in *Philadelphia*, 545; Dezfuli-Arjomandi, "Benjamin Franklin Parkway," 172.
- ¹⁴ William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1989), 30, 75-95; City Parks Association, *Annual Report* 28 (1913), 46.
- ¹⁵ Burt and Davies, "The Iron Age," in *Philadelphia*, 471.
- ¹⁶ Andrew Wright Crawford et al., "An Outline of the History of the Fairmount Parkway" in *Fairmount Park Art Association: An Account of its Origin and Activities from its Founding in 1871* (Philadelphia: Fairmount Park Art Association (hereafter FPAA), 1922), 244-50.
- ¹⁷ Brownlee, *Building*, 71.
- ¹⁸ *The Fairmount Parkway: A Pictorial Record of Development* (Philadelphia: FPAA, 1919); Jacques Gréber as quoted in Art Jury, *Annual Report* 8 (1918), 8.
- ¹⁹ In fact, a commission appointed by the Fairmount Park Art Association (FPAA) noted that from Logan Square to City Hall, the Parkway "would probably assume a character not unlike that of Broad Street below the City Hall." See "Report of the Commission employed by the Fairmount Park Art Association to study the entrance of the Philadelphia Parkway into Fairmount Park" in FPAA, *Annual Report* 36 (1908): 47. Werner Hegemann and Elbert Petes praise Philadelphia's State House group as a model 18th century civic center. See *The American Vitruvius: An Architect's Hand Book of Civic Art*, ed. Alan J. Plattus (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988), 133.
- ²⁰ John Reyburn as quoted in "Minutes of General Committee Meeting," *Philadelphia* IV, no. 3 (Mar. 1911): 8.
- ²¹ "Philadelphia's Comprehensive Plans," *Philadelphia* IV, no. 3 (Mar. 1911): 2.
- ²² "Comprehensive Plans Number," *Philadelphia* IV, no. 3 (Mar. 1911).
- ²³ "Complete Plans For Great Hall To Bridge River; To Seat 18,400," *Philadelphia North American* (hereafter NA), 25 Jun. 1910. In 1887, the Wilson Brothers of Philadelphia designed a Providence train station which featured its terminal on a viaduct spanning the Woonasquatucket River. See William H. Jordy and Christopher P. Monkhouse, *Buildings on Paper: Rhode Island Architectural Drawings, 1825-1945* (Providence: Brown Univ., 1982), 204.

- ²⁴ "Complete Plans For Great Hall To Bridge River; To Seat 18,400," NA (hereafter NA), 25 Jun. 1910.
- ²⁵ Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia (hereafter CCGP), *Annual Report* (1917).
- ²⁶ Brownlee, *Building*, 95; "Complete Plans For Great Hall To Bridge River; To Seat 18,400," NA, 25 Jun. 1910; "Find New Site For Convention Hall," *Philadelphia Public Ledger* (hereafter PL), 23 Oct. 1915; "Convention Hall Will Be In Park," PL, [Jan. 1911?], *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* News Clipping Collection, Urban Archives, Temple Univ. (hereafter BTU); "Site of Philadelphia's New Convention Hall in the Park," PL, 30 Jul. 1911.
- ²⁷ John Windrim, "Proposed Assembly Center at 'The Cliffs,'" "Auditorium Stadium and Coliseum in Fairmount Park," and "Grand Assembly Centre and its Relation to the Parkway," reprinted in *Philadelphia IV*, no. 3 (Mar. 1911): 38-40; Brownlee, *Building*, 95; "Philadelphia's Municipal Convention Hall to Be Largest in World," PL, 10 Aug. 1911; "City Now Ready To Build Convention Hall In Park," no cite, 10 Aug. 1911, BTU.
- ²⁸ Reyburn as quoted in "Minutes of General Committee Meeting," *Philadelphia IV*, no. 3 (Mar. 1911): 9.
- ²⁹ Thomas Schlereth, "County Stores, County Fairs, and Mail Order Catalogues: Consumption in Rural America" in *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 357-73.
- ³⁰ Gray Brechin, "San Francisco: The City Beautiful" in *Visionary San Francisco*, ed. Paolo Polledri (Munich: Prestel, 1990), 58.
- ³¹ Convention Hall Committee as quoted in "Urge 'The Cliffs' For Site of Hall," PL, 22 Feb. 1911. The Committee also pointed out that the Snyder's Woods location would be "not any further or more difficult to reach than was the Republican National Convention, which was held in the auditorium of the Commercial Museum."
- ³² "Report of Committee on Site for a Convention Hall," *Philadelphia IV*, no. 3 (Mar. 1911): 13-14.
- ³³ "Want Convention Hall Over River," EB, 2 Nov. 1910; "To Start Petition In Hall Site Fight," PL, 11 Nov. 1910; "30,000 Favor Bridge Hall," PL, [Nov. 1910?]; "Convention Hall Committee Named," [Nov. 1910?], no cite, BTU; "Hall Site Postals Annoy The Mayor," EB, 21 Mar. 1911; "Councils Approve 'The Cliffs' Site," PL, 31 Mar. 1911.
- ³⁴ Councils as quoted in *Ibid.*
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*; *First Municipal City Planning Exhibition in America* (1911), 12-13; "City Now Ready To Build Convention Hall In Park," no cite, 10 Aug. 1911, BTU; "Convention Hall Contract Awarded," PL, 22 Oct. 1911. The Grand Assembly Centre was not represented on the scale model displayed at the 1911 exhibition.
- ³⁶ "The Nord Oestliche Saengerbund" in *Official Souvenir Program: 23rd National Saengerfest of the Nord Oestliche Saengerbund of America* (1912), 25-31, German Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter GSP); "Membership of Committees," *Philadelphia IV*, no. 3 (Mar. 1911): 3-6; "Taxpayers Sue To Stop Work On Hall," PL, 9 Nov. 1911.
- ³⁷ "Enjoin Temporary Convention Hall," PL, 2 Dec. 1911; Reyburn as quoted in "Mayor Disappointed by Court Decision," PL, 2 Dec. 1911.
- ³⁸ Brownlee, *Building*, 28; Morris Llewellyn Cooke, *Our Cities Awake: Notes on Municipal Activities and Administration* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1919): 73; Abernethy, "Progressivism" in *Philadelphia*, 551-56; Blake McKelvey, *The Emergence of Metropolitan America, 1915-1966* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1968), 9.
- ³⁹ North Penn had also been the setting for the Pennsylvania State Agricultural Society Fairgrounds in the 1880s-90s. See George E. Thomas, Michael A. Lewis, and Jeffrey A. Cohen, *Frank Furness: The Complete Works* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press,

1991), 249. Bruce Kuklick, *To Everything a Season: Shibe Park and Urban Philadelphia, 1909-1976* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991), 21-22; "Convention Hall Given \$50,000 More," *EB*, [Jan. 1912?]; "Convention Hall Plans Announced," *EB*, 9 Jan. 1912; "\$106,000 Lowest Bid On Convention Hall," *EB*, [Jan.-Feb. 1912?]; "Mayor Opens Work On Convention Hall," *EB*, 26 Feb. 1912.

⁴⁰ Oswald Seidensticker and Max Henrici, *Geschichte der Deutschen Gesellschaft von Pennsylvanien, 1764-1917* (Philadelphia: Graf & Brenninger, 1917), 462; Sandra L. Tatman and Roger W. Moss, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects, 1700-1930* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1985), 58-61; Irwin R. Glazer, *Philadelphia Theatres, A-Z: A Complete Descriptive Record of 813 Theatres Constructed Since 1724* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1980), 292.

⁴¹ "New Convention Hall At Broad And Allegheny Ave. As It Appears To-Day," *EB*, 25 May 1912; Folders #1972 and #19, Photograph Collection, Philadelphia City Archives (hereafter PCA); "Accepts Convention Hall," *EB*, 29 Jun. 1912; "Mayor Opens Work On Convention Hall," *EB*, 26 Feb. 1912; "Protest The Terms On Convention Hall," *EB*, 23 May 1912; "History and Description of the Saengerfest Concert Hall," *Official Souvenir*. 3, GSP.

⁴² "City Will Lease Its Convention Hall," *PL*, 7 Jul. 1912; "Try To Rent Convention Hall," *EB*, 29 Jul. 1912; "Lone Bid For Lease Of Convention Hall," *EB*, 29 Aug. 1912; "Leased Convention Hall," unidentified source, 27 Aug. 1912, no cite, BTU.

⁴³ "Boxing In Convention Hall," *EB*, 6 Oct. 1913. The "Stone Man's League" was a secret fraternal and anti-Catholic organization of which Blankenburg's Director of Public Safety George D. Porter was a member.

⁴⁴ "Convention Hall To Go," *EB*, 19 May 1916; "Reprieve Convention Hall," *EB*, 22 May 1916; "Would End Convention Hall," *EB*, 18 May 1916; "Convention Hall Soon To Be Razed," *PL*, 2 Nov. 1916; "To Demolish Big Convention Hall," no cite, 15 Oct. 1916, BTU; "Delay in Demolition of Convention Hall," *EB*, 6 Feb. 1917; "Convention Hall Now Razed," *EB*, 6 Jun. 1917.

⁴⁵ Cooke as quoted in "Revive Plan To Erect New Convention Hall," *Philadelphia Public Record* (hereafter *PR*), 28 Mar. 1915; "City Arranges To Build Hall For Convention," *PL*, 28 Mar. 1915.

⁴⁶ "Opposition To Cooke's Plan," *EB*, 29 Mar. 1915; "Plan For Central Convention Hall Draws Opposition," *PL*, 29 Mar. 1915; "Business Men Plan For Convention Hall Hearing," *PL*, 20 Apr. 1915 and "Convention Hall Site In Fairmount Park Receives Full Approval Of Trade Board," *PL*, 20 Apr. 1915.

⁴⁷ Hampton L. Carson and A.F. Daix as quoted in "Convention Hall Sites Argued To-Day," *EB*, 26 Apr. 1915.

⁴⁸ "Park Not To Get Convention Hall," *PL*, 7 May 1915; "Shows Advantage Of Hall On Parkway," *EB*, 2 Jun. 1915; "Convention Hall's New Site Favored," *PL*, 1 Aug. 1915; Rudolph Blankenburg as quoted in "Urge Parkway For Convention Hall," *EB*, 7 Sep. 1915.

⁴⁹ Brownlee, *Building*, 29

⁵⁰ "Amend Ordinance on Convention Hall," *EB*, 17 Feb. 1916; "Site Of City's Convention Hall," *PL*, 19 Feb. 1916.

⁵¹ Brownlee, *Building*, 96; Art Jury, file #585, PCA; "Plans Completed For Big Auditorium," *EB*, 15 Jul. 1916; "New Convention Hall Here Will Cost \$4,000,000," *PL*, 15 Jul. 1916; "Start Convention Hall Work In Fall," no cite, 30 Jul. 1916, BTU; "Ideal Balcony Floor For Convention Hall," *PL*, 31 Jul. 1916.

⁵² George E. Datesman as quoted in "Plans Are Completed For Convention Hall," *PR*, 15 Jul. 1916.

⁵³ "Start Convention Hall Work In Fall," 30 Jul. 1916; "Ready For Convention Hall," *EB*, 29 Sep. 1916.

- ⁵⁴ "Court Halts Work On Convention Hall," *EB*, 15 Jan. 1917; Chief Justice J. Hay Brown quoted in same.
- ⁵⁵ "City To Use Museum As Convention Hall," *EB*, 7 Feb. 1917; "To Build Convention Hall Upon Parkway With Funds Available," *EB*, 17 Feb. 1917; "New Plans for Smaller Convention Hall," *Philadelphia Record*, 12 Mar. 1917; Director's Office, Department of Public Works, "The New Municipal Auditorium" [press release], 11 Mar. 1917, Campbell Collection, HSP.
- ⁵⁶ Ernest T. Trigg as quoted in "Small Convention Hall Is Opposed," *EB*, 6 Mar. 1917.
- ⁵⁷ "Mayor For Big Hall Of Steel And Glass," *EB*, 20 Mar. 1917.
- ⁵⁸ Brownlee, *Building*, 96, 35.
- ⁵⁹ Abernethy, "Progressivism" in *Philadelphia*, 564-68; Robert Edward Drayer, "J. Hampton Moore: An Old-Fashioned Republican" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1961), 175-80.
- ⁶⁰ J. Hampton Moore as quoted in "Moore Promises City Big Museum," *EB*, 18 Nov. 1918.
- ⁶¹ "Mayor Will Plan Hall On Parkway," *EB*, 14 Nov. 1920; "New Site Favored For Assembly Hall," *Public Ledger*, [ca. 1920-23?].
- ⁶² In *Mystic Chords of Memory*, Michael Kammen does not discuss the production of WWI memorials (New York: Knopf, 1991). The creation of a Victory Arch at Logan Square was being considered in 1919. See Albert Kelsey, "Address to the Fairmount Park Art Association," *Annual Report* 36 (1919), 46.
- ⁶³ "Official Souvenir, Cleveland Public Auditorium," 1922, mounted in vol. XXIV, Warren P. Laird Collection, Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania (hereafter AAUP); Holly M. Rarick, *Progressive Vision: The Planning of Downtown Cleveland, 1903-1930* (Bloomington: Cleveland Museum of Art and Indiana Univ. Press, 1986), 76-77; Eric Johannesen, *Cleveland Architecture, 1876-1976* (Cleveland: Western Reserve Historical Society, c. 1979), 151-52.
- ⁶⁴ "Men and Things," *EB*, 10 Jun. 1924.
- ⁶⁵ Pennsylvania, *An Act Authorizing the erection and construction by counties of memorial halls*. (1921), secs. 1-7; Warren P. Laird, "Note on 'Victory Hall,'" [post-1929], vol. XXIV, Laird Papers, AAUP.
- ⁶⁶ Laird, "Index," 1:5-9, Laird Papers, AAUP. These cities included Springfield, MA; Ventnor, Newark, and Atlantic City, NJ; Pittsburgh and Merion, PA; Niles, OH; Nashville, TN; and Richmond, VA.
- ⁶⁷ Laird, "Program of Competition for the Selection of An Architect for the Proposed Victory Hall," 1924, vol. XXIV, Laird Papers, AAUP. File #1698 reveals that the Art Jury approved plans for a Victory Hall at 20th, Race, 21st, and Winter Streets in April 1924. Unfortunately, the plans were destroyed, and the identity of the designer is unknown. See Art Jury, file #1698, PCA.
- ⁶⁸ "Unite The Funds," *EL*, 15 Oct. 1923; "Hall of Victory Plans Attacked," *PL*, 25 Dec. 1922; "Victory Hall Plans Take Definite Shape," *PL*, [Nov. 1924?], City Architect's Scrapbook, PCA.
- ⁶⁹ Arthur P. Dudden, "The City Embraces 'Normalcy': 1919-1929," in *Philadelphia*, 570-71; "New Hall Site Plan Stirs Upper Darby," *EB*, 29 Nov. 1924; "Vets Ready To Attack Plan of Victory Hall," *PL*, 25 Nov. 1924; "City's Need Cut From Plans For Victory Hall," *PL*, 27 Nov. 1924.
- ⁷⁰ W. Freeland Kendrick as quoted in "Mayor Picks Site On Schuylkill For Convention Hall," *EB*, 10 Dec. 1924.
- ⁷¹ Kendrick as quoted in "Asks New Start on Hall Projects," *EB*, 24 Sep. 1925.
- ⁷² "Plan to Put Court in Convention Hall," *EB*, 20 Mar. 1926.
- ⁷³ Laird, "Note on 'Victory Hall,'" [post 1929], vol. XXIV, Laird Papers, AAUP; Brownlee, *Building*, 99; Paul P. Cret, "Victory Hall," 1925, 185.3, Cret Collection, AAUP; "Considers

Market Street Site for Convention Hall," *Philadelphia Evening Ledger* (hereafter *EL*), 10 Mar. 1926; "Convention Hall on Parkway Likely," *EB*, 24 Mar. 1926.

⁷⁴ Cret to John Frederick Lewis, 12 Jul. 1926, Art Jury, file #2158, PCA.

⁷⁵ "Fine Features Shown In Plans For Great Hall," no cite, 11 Jul. 1926, BTU.

⁷⁶ Kendrick (on July 23) as quoted in "Convention Hall Shelved By City," *EL*, 8 Feb. 1927.

⁷⁷ "Convention Hall Space Increased," *EB*, 5 Aug. 1926; "New Convention Hall Plans Made," *EB*, 31 Jul. 1925.

⁷⁸ Sesqui-Centennial Exposition Association, "New Modern Plan for the Celebration of the Sesqui-Centennial Anniversary of American Independence," 1923, Ephemera Collection, HSP; Eli Kirk Price, "Address" in Fairmount Park Art Association, *Annual Report* 50 (1922): 24-31.

⁷⁹ Moore, "The Sesqui-Centennial Exposition" (message of the mayor to the Council), 16 Mar. 1922, Ephemera Collection, HSP.

⁸⁰ "Report of the Sesqui-Centennial Committee of the Engineers' Club of Philadelphia on Sites," 25 Jan. 1922, Ephemera Collection, HSP; Edward P. Simon, "The Municipal Stadium," in *The Sesqui-Centennial Exposition* by E.L. Austin and Odell Hauser (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 419-23; Dudden, "'Normalcy,'" in Weigley, *Philadelphia*, 571-72.

⁸¹ CCGP, *Annual Report* (1926), 22.

⁸² John Frederick Lewis, introduction to E.L. Austin and Odell Hauser, *The Sesqui-Centennial Exposition* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 21-26, 50-51.

⁸³ George Soule, *Prosperity Decade: From War to Depression, 1917-1929* (Rinehart & Company, 1947), 110-113, 150-51; McKelvey, *Emergence*, 31-34.

⁸⁴ Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteent-Twenties* (New York: Harper & Row, 1931), 209-210; "Sesqui-Centennial Games," Mar. 1926, Ephemera Collection, HSP; Frank W. Skinner, "The Sesqui-Centennial Exposition, Philadelphia," *Architectural Record* LX, no. 1 (July 1926): 1-15; Austin and Hauser, *Sesqui-Centennial* 434-440.

⁸⁵ CCGP, *Annual Report* (1927), 25.

Chapter 3

A "great coliseum of the twentieth century": Philadelphia's Convention Hall

With everybody crying for better streets and repaved streets,
I think it is well to use the money available for urgent things.
Business men who have studied the subject say that great convention halls are passé.
Merchants are steadily realizing the need of expositions is decreasing.¹
—Harry A. Mackey, Republican candidate for mayor, 1927

This is an era of advertising, and nothing advertises a city more
than a building in which the largest conventions may be held.²
—Mayor Harry A. Mackey at the groundbreaking for Convention Hall, 1930

☛ *A public celebration*

On 18 September 1931, more than 10,000 people gathered to attend the public opening of Philadelphia's new Municipal Auditorium on the grounds of the Commercial Museum at 34th and Pine Streets (*fig. 29*). In the large auditorium, they heard a chorus of 1000 voices, an organist, several soloists (including Philadelphia's favorite son Nelson Eddy), and a harp ensemble perform a lengthy program of works that concluded with Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" and the "Star-Spangled Banner." They watched as a "golden key" to the hall was passed from building contractor Matthew McCloskey to architect Philip H. Johnson to Mayor Harry A. Mackey to Auditorium Bureau manager Julien L. Eysmans. After touring the entire building, they were roused by a fanfare by Frankford Post Bugle Corp. No. 211 which summoned them back to the auditorium for dancing that lasted early into the morning. When announcing plans for the great opening festival, Eysmans explained, "Convention Hall was built by Philadelphians for Philadelphians[,] and while we hope to hold many conventions there, we also want Philadelphia to know its beauties and the opportunities it affords for amusement and instruction."³

After twenty-two years of conflicts of interest and dashed plans, the building opened with a flourish. But, as Eysmans's circuitous comment implies, it was unclear

which constituency the Municipal Auditorium (popularly known as Convention Hall) was to serve. While the public had been invited to participate in the opening ceremony, the persons who literally held the key to the palace were the contractor and architect (who both made hundreds of thousands of dollars on the project), the mayor (who earned the distinction of seeing the project through) and the chairman (who as vice-president of the Pennsylvania Railroad savored the idea of hundreds of events and millions of people coming to Philadelphia each year). Mayor Mackey essentially allowed the Chamber of Commerce to organize the convention hall project. The Chamber's Convention Bureau chief (Albert M. Greenfield) and a board of businessmen and professionals worked with the mayor to see their vision to completion. Evidently, private interests would shape the new public institution.

It was also unclear how an institution conceived in the civic idealism of the Progressive era would function during the Great Depression. For twenty relatively prosperous years, a struggle had raged between Civic Center boosters, who wanted a convention hall near the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, and dominant business interests, who favored a downtown location. In 1930-31, Philadelphia began to feel the effects of a depressed economy—and managed to construct a \$5.3 million convention hall. Did the decision to build on the non-central, city-owned grounds of the Commercial Museum signify a repudiation of City Beautiful values, a concession on the part of downtown businesses, a measure of economy and convenience, or a big gamble? How would the domestic agenda of the Convention Hall integrate with the international trade objectives of the Commercial Museum? Would the new building usher in a fresh brand of civic architecture and planning for 1930s Philadelphia, or did it express the compromise of old ideals in a modern fashion? This struggle between old ideals and new realities marked the next phase in the genesis of Philadelphia's Convention Hall.

☛ *New commitments to old ideas*

During the October stretch of his 1927 campaign for mayor, City Treasurer Harry A. Mackey proposed diverting the bulk of the \$5.235 million loan available for a convention hall, and using the fund for street improvements. Outgoing Mayor W. Freeland Kendrick had reluctantly surrendered the convention hall project but still managed to pump millions of dollars into public works projects and the Sesqui-Centennial. The Board of Municipal Research estimated that between 1924 and 1928, the city spent \$186 million on public works—two-and-a-half times the amount spent between 1919 and 1924. A large percentage of Kendrick's spending had supported the Broad Street Subway and Frankford Elevated and the Roosevelt and Northeast Boulevards—projects on which favored contractors made substantial profits. Mackey publicly announced (before an audience of Keystone Automobile Club members) that a general streets improvement effort would benefit the entire city, not a single constituency.⁴

Mackey's position begs the question if the creation of a convention hall constituted a "public work." On the one hand, this new building would require the outlay of public funds; it would provide a space for some large-scale public assemblies; its design and construction would be regulated by the government; and its board of directors would be responsible to the mayor. The new convention hall would also entail the award of a lucrative construction contract to a private firm; it would attract out-of-town visitors to spend money on the city's goods and services; its features would largely cater to the needs of professional exhibitors and conventioners; and its board would be composed mostly of private businessmen. Most events that would take place within its walls would require admission fees, specialized interests, professional status, exclusive memberships, or some

combination of the four. The convention hall would be a publicly-funded institution of primary (but not exclusive) use and benefit to private, commercial interests.

For better or for worse, the Sesqui-Centennial had showcased the growing might of the Chamber of Commerce in the direction of city affairs. In fact, the work of the Chamber of Commerce can be compared to that of the Commercial Museum in its support of local businessmen. The latter institution served as an extra-governmental office that offered otherwise unavailable services to firms engaged in international trade, and its work later became the model for the federal government's Department of Commerce (established as the Department of Commerce and Labor in 1903 and created as a separate department in 1913).⁵ Since the 1890s, the Chamber had provided local businesses with a range of services, many of which would eventually be offered by such new governmental organizations as city and state Departments of Commerce and the city's Board of Trade and Conventions.

During the first decades of the 20th century, the city relied heavily on work performed by the Chamber's Convention Bureau in promoting Philadelphia as a meeting destination. In addition to lobbying for a convention hall, the Bureau's many activities included trying to attract a "Convention a Day for Philadelphia," studying various convention facilities across the country, and running a "Selling Philadelphia to Philadelphians" campaign to rally local support. These efforts were entirely bankrolled by Chamber members. Despite the city's lack of large-scale, dedicated facilities, the Chamber of Commerce succeeded in attracting hundreds of conventions to Philadelphia each year. The Bureau estimated that even in the year following the convention-heavy Sesqui-Centennial, 85,000 visitors spent nearly \$8 million in the city while attending nearly two hundred conventions at downtown hotels, the Academy of Music, and local universities and colleges.⁶

The influence of the Chamber of Commerce surged as their member Albert M. Greenfield emerged as a high-profile player in Philadelphia affairs. Beginning with the Sesqui-Centennial, Greenfield served as a very visible spokesman for the Chamber and its Conventions Bureau (which he directed). Not only did this real estate broker own countless blocks of city property and several major hotels, but he was on the board of directors of dozens of organizations and devoted (for the meantime) to the Republican machine.⁷

When Mackey campaigned for street improvements, the local newspapers printed Greenfield's counter-statement announcing the Chamber's position in favor of constructing a substantial convention hall. As head of the Bureau of Exhibitions and Conventions, he released a report that countered the candidate's assertion that "Business men. . .say that great convention halls are passé" (see introductory quotations). The report explained that because the city was one of the few municipalities without an adequate convention hall, Philadelphia would continue to "lose numerous valuable trade associations' conventions" until it could offer "adequate space in a properly equipped building." Longtime president of City Council Charles B. Hall knowingly commented that Mackey might "change his mind" on diverting the funds to street improvements upon taking office.⁸

Actually, Mackey did approve of erecting a convention hall, but he naively expected it could be done cheaply. In October 1927, mayoral candidate Mackey guessed, "It would not require more than \$100,000 to alter one of the buildings of the Commercial Museum to convert it into a convention hall which would seat 25,000 persons."⁹ In 1928, Mayor Mackey periodically announced cost estimates which rose as seating levels fell: a \$1 million hall for 20,000 persons (23 January); a \$2.5 million hall for 20,000 (26 January); a \$3 million hall for 15,000 (14 February); a \$3.5 million hall for 15,000 (26 April); and eventually a \$5.3 million hall for 13,500. The

ascending price no doubt reflected an increasing level of congeniality between the mayor and the Chamber of Commerce, whose members dominated the committee charged with selecting a site for the new convention hall. Appointed by the mayor in February, the committee of seven included University of Pennsylvania trustees Edward Hopkinson, Jr. and Charles L. Borie, Jr.; Theodore E. Nickles of the Philadelphia Real Estate Board; and Ernest T. Trigg, Charles S. Calwell, Charles J. Webb, and Albert M. Greenfield (chair) of the Chamber of Commerce.¹⁰

Considering the lengthy, embattled history of the convention hall project, the committee finalized a site selection in surprisingly swift fashion. The committee only had to confirm the currently favored location between the Commercial Museum's North and Central Buildings, where the old National Export Exposition auditorium had once stood. This site had been under consideration since its first adaptive reuse for the 1900 Republican National Convention. In 1917, Director William P. Wilson offered the city the use of the Commercial Museum's facilities for exhibition purposes (see Chapter 1). For the next decade, steady rentals of the museum complex attested to its success as a potential substitute for a convention hall. Sporadically, a Museum official or the current mayor would advance the idea of locating a permanent convention hall on the grounds of the Commercial Museum, but this idea consistently failed to capture the imagination of the public, of business interests, or of the Councils until 1927.¹¹

It is interesting to note the arguments made by the numerous proponents of this site. They remembered Philadelphia's last national party convention (the 1900 Republican National Convention), stressed the convenient access via railroad (and later the University Bridge), and emphasized that the property was available at no cost to the city. Wilson's 1924 bid even pointed out that "only two walls and the roof need be constructed" if the hall made use of the adjacent walls of the North and

Center Buildings.¹² Proponents did not mention, or perhaps even foresee, how the convention business and the work of the Commercial Museum might overlap.

The only serious resistance to locating the new hall on the grounds of the Commercial Museum was presented by the University of Pennsylvania. On behalf of the Trustees, Hopkinson offered the city a seventeen-acre tract below South Street fronting on the proposed West River Drive. He explained that the University exerted a "moral" claim to the museum grounds stemming from the 1916 court decision which ruled that Penn would acquire the property upon the museum's failure (see pages 26-27).¹³ During this period of its own institutional history, the University was considering the feasibility of relocating to a Valley Forge campus; this factor may have figured in Borie and Hopkinson's qualms about the Commercial Museum site. In any case, by late April, the mayor announced the committee's unanimous decision in favor of the Commercial Museum site. Up to \$5,352,000 was available for the new hall; the remaining balance was to be applied towards street improvements.¹⁴

It is significant that there were no proposals for a Fairmount Parkway or Fairmount Park location during the final deliberations over site. Plainly put, commercial values edged out civic values. "The Cliffs," the various Victory Hall proposals, and Windrim's 1917 design had created places for recreation, convocation, or public memory. In doing so, they contributed to the beneficent mission of the Park and the vision of the Parkway as a civic center. Although other cities (notably Cleveland and San Francisco) had incorporated convention halls into their civic center plans, Philadelphia's most influential business interests resisted such a scheme. A Parkway site may have required a larger commitment to public programming and a greater public accountability. Instead of contributing to a municipal civic center, the new convention hall would be a more independent multi-

purpose institution slightly out of City Hall's purview—and slightly off subway lines. The new Municipal Auditorium would rise in West Philadelphia.

➤ *Architect and design*

The relative ease with which a location was chosen provided enough momentum to propel the project to completion, despite some controversy concerning the architect and minor stone-carving blunders. Mayor Mackey made a conspicuous oversight when he selected an architect for the expensive public project without announcing a design competition. In May, he solicited recommendations on cost and layout from J. Harold MacDowell, the architect of Cleveland's Public Auditorium. In early August, local newspapers broke the story concerning the clandestine appointment of the city's longtime "special architect," Philip H. Johnson, to design the new convention hall. The articles described the substantial 6% commission Johnson earned on all of his projects and announced Deputy City Controller S. Davis Wilson's intention to contest the legality of the appointment.¹⁵

A Mason, a member of the Chamber of Commerce, and a prominent yachtsman, Philip H. Johnson (1868-1933) was a relatively versatile and thoroughly connected architect. Johnson's obituary in the *Architectural Forum* makes no mention of formal schooling. He was working as a carpenter when his brother-in-law, city boss Israel W. Durham, offered him a plum job as exclusive, lifetime architect to the City Department of Health in 1901. In this position (ordained by City Council in 1903), Johnson erected dozens of public hospitals, bathhouses, institutional buildings, and the like, including such noteworthy hospital groups as the Philadelphia General Hospital (facing the Commercial Museum, 1919) and the Philadelphia Hospital for Contagious Diseases (at 2nd and Luzerne Streets, 1914). Commissions from other City and State Departments followed. His very limited work in the private sector included alterations to the home of Council president Charles S. Hall (1903), a

residence for city boss Edward H. Vare (1904), and a residence with subsequent alterations for machine politician W. Freeland Kendrick (1920, 1925). Johnson had an agreement with the Republican Organization: he offered Organization men his architectural services, and they protected his lucrative government contract.¹⁶

In fact, it was during the Kendrick administration that Johnson earned his single most lucrative commission: the design of the City Hall Annex (1925). In an article entitled “Rule of Kendrick Enriches Johnson,” a local newspaper pointed out that Johnson’s contract earned him \$180,000 (or 6%) of the \$3 million cost of City Hall Annex. Even if the contract were crooked, the resulting fifteen-story tower (on the corner of Juniper and Filbert Streets) was admired for its vaulted arcade and its “Italian Renaissance” decoration executed in limestone. It complemented the collection of classicizing buildings scattered around Center Square—such as Burnham’s building for Wanamaker’s (1902-11) and the Girard Trust building (1905-08) by McKim, Mead, and White with Furness, Evans & Co. Furthermore, it helped link this group to the Parkway. The City Hall Annex contributed to Johnson’s resume of works that displayed his facility with the popular period styles, his ability to conceptualize large-scale projects, and his capacity for designing buildings that expressed civic stability.¹⁷

Over the course of Johnson’s thirty-two year career designing public buildings, his “perpetual contract” was the target of various inquiries and many insults. Early in his administration, Mayor Mackey himself raised objections to the monopoly on municipal projects held by an “outside architect” at “big fees.”¹⁸ One can speculate as to why the mayor awarded Johnson the Convention Hall commission. Without doubt, the Republican machine influenced the decision. Given the composition of the Convention Hall committee, it was sound diplomacy to select an architect who held a

membership of the Chamber of Commerce. It is even possible that the mayor admired Johnson's work; certainly there were plenty of extant examples.

In a strict sense, Philip H. Johnson was as qualified for the task as any other Philadelphia architect. Maybe a dozen local architects had ever designed a convention hall, and none (with the exception of Carl Berger) had witnessed the construction of their designs. In any case, what would have been proper projects to have in one's portfolio before designing a convention hall? Some local architects had constructed great auditoriums for theatres, movie palaces, music halls, and world's fair pavilions. Others had erected imposing semi-public buildings with multiple functions under one roof, such as grand hotels and department stores. Others had demonstrated engineering prowess and created monumental structures, such as stadiums, train sheds, and armories. Still others still had built municipal buildings for the 20th century metropolis: museums, libraries, city halls, courthouses. In addition to a long list of institutional buildings, Johnson's résumé included three unrealized pavilions for world's fairs and three state armories.¹⁹

Besides, Johnson benefited from the counsel of fellow Chamber of Commerce members who had organized conventions in Philadelphia and attended events in Cleveland's Public Auditorium, Denver's Auditorium, Atlanta's Auditorium-Armory, San Francisco's Municipal Civic Auditorium, and other locales. Both former Chamber president Ernest Trigg and business lawyer Hampton Carson had pointed out that businessmen understood from experience the functional requirements of a good convention hall plan (see Chapter 2). They required a multitude of services, such as telephone and telegraph services, a barbershop, and a restaurant. Philadelphia businessmen noticed a useful feature that many halls lacked, and they advised Johnson to create a well-appointed ballroom within the walls of the convention hall.

City Council soon approved Johnson's appointment, and Mackey and the architect made a trip west to inspect Cleveland's Public Auditorium and Detroit's Convention Hall. Clearly the trip made an impression. Johnson's preliminary sketches included the primary Vintage Avenue (west) elevation, which closely replicated features of the Cleveland building, from its channeled ashlar base to its gable monitor (*figs. 30 and 31*). Both designs featured a masonry clad box with a projecting front bay punctuated by five arcuated windows over five doorways. In a statement read by the mayor, Johnson described how his "Italian Renaissance style" building would feature "modern fireproof construction," namely a steel frame faced with Indiana limestone and a granite base. At the same time, the auditorium's arched openings, classicizing decoration, and gable roof would complement the Commercial Museum buildings.²⁰

Like the exterior appearance, the interior arrangement was to replicate the Public Auditorium in some respects, surpass it in others, and integrate into the existing Commercial Museum complex (*fig. 32*). Again, Johnson's description called for a main lobby finished with marble floors and wainscot, decorative plaster ceiling, and ornamental bronze grilles. The lobby would access the arena via corridors (with exits) running the length of the building. The arena's great column-free space would rise 85' from floor to glass ceiling. A crowd of 13,000 (later increased to 13,500) could be accommodated on the main floor and two balcony levels. An additional 1500 persons could fit on the immense stage, which would be flanked by dressing rooms. The second floor would also feature an elegant ballroom and six committee rooms, and the basement would contain a large exhibition hall, a restaurant capable of seating 700, a kitchen, and a barber shop. Telephone booths, checkrooms, toilets, and rest rooms would appear throughout the building. Its thoroughly modern

amenities included a 42-ton steel and asbestos fire curtain for the stage, a pipe organ, recirculating air, automatic sprinklers, and a central vacuum cleaning system.²¹

To integrate the convention hall with the Commercial Museum complex, Johnson proposed several alterations to the museum buildings. His plan arranged the new basement hall on the same level as the Commercial Museum's exhibition spaces to the south, included underground passages to connect the group, extended the rear railroad siding to the new building, and created a new power plant to service the entire complex. The most dramatic alteration called for the demolition of the wall between the old Exhibition and South Buildings so as to create one large space. This arrangement would bring the total exhibition area to nearly 228,000 square feet: 6600 in the corridors; 35,000 in the arena; 37,000 in the new basement exhibition hall; and 149,000 in the combined Exhibition and South Buildings. Johnson commented that "Unquestionably, the new building added to present facilities, will give the city the finest installation of its kind in the country."²² Certainly, it would be the largest.

Johnson's plans were approved and publicized in early February. The newspapers printed the Vintage Avenue elevation, the architect's description, and the numerous enthusiasms of the mayor, the director of the Bureau of Conventions and Exhibitions of the Chamber of Commerce, and various editorialists. Mackey and Johnson even took to the airwaves to broadcast the wonders of the future convention hall on WCAU. Mackey requested construction bids for the project that fall. Though the lowest of the first group of bids exceeded the available funds by \$1 million, the next round fell within the limit. The politically connected firm of McCloskey & Co., Inc. won the construction contract, and William M. Anderson picked up the contract for heating and mechanical systems.²³

The project had already earned the approval of the Art Jury. The twenty-four drawings submitted to the Art Jury reveal several changes to the published

descriptions of the building. Johnson altered the building's overall massing by replacing the gable monitor roof with a dramatic barrel vault (*fig. 33*). He may have realized that Atlantic City's new Convention Hall (1926-27) had surpassed even Cleveland's Public Auditorium as the nation's premier convention showplace. Seating 40,000 people under an enormous arched roof, Atlantic City's Convention Hall (*fig. 34*) was essentially a decorated lobby and ballroom building attached to a utilitarian arena structure (the latter part not unlike the Sesqui-Centennial's Auditorium Building). Johnson's new design, albeit on a smaller scale, adapted the arched roof but more convincingly integrated it between the walls. To achieve this, Johnson ran a frieze of swags and shields around the entire building and used the same generous window openings along the front and two side facades (*fig. 35*). Other changes to the exterior design included squaring the window openings and omitting the canopy from the front entrance.²⁴

Johnson further decorated the exterior with low-relief figurative carvings. These included the state and city seals; panels depicting the four continents; and friezes portraying luminaries in the fields of education, sports, scientific research, and the arts. Note the lack of representations of commerce. Inscribed with the label "MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM," the building was decorated as such—and not as a place of business or trade. The subjects of the friezes expressed a compromise between classically inspired allegorical sculpture groups (used at Philadelphia's City Hall and on the plaster decorations of the National Export Exposition pavilions) and the more stylized "new architectural sculpture" that often valorized the experiences of common citizens (exemplified by Lee Lawrie's work on the Nebraska State Capitol).²⁵ Convention Hall's groupings of famous dead white males presented a canon of heroes appropriate for public admiration. The Art Jury's initial misgivings about the execution of the architectural sculpture were warranted (see below), though

the overall effect of the pieces would be minimal.²⁶ The very shallow relief, stubby lines, and elevated location of the friezes would render them somewhat illegible.

☛ *Construction and completion*

On 7 January 1930, Mayor Mackey climbed aboard a steam shovel and excavated almost a ton of earth from the 34th and Pine Street site. He was joined at the groundbreaking ceremony by chairman of the convention hall committee Albert M. Greenfield, the directors of the Departments of Public Works and Architecture, and the secretary and president of the Chamber of Commerce. Mackey proclaimed that modern advertising would not only find markets for Philadelphia's manufactures but also for Philadelphia's educational and cultural attractions. His speech reflects if not a new civic consciousness, at least a new civic competitiveness:

Municipalities large and small have been brought to realize the value of seeking business rather than have it thrust upon them, and they enter into competition for national and industrial trade. . . . We are facing the future with the realization of the fact that to achieve success we must compete with other progressive municipalities of the United States, and use modern advertising methods to impress the world with the greatness of Philadelphia. This Convention Hall will greatly aid us in our fight for the recognition of our city in the distribution of the trade on the world. This Convention Hall, when completed, will be one of the finest on earth.²⁷

Though conceived during the more prosperous Progressive era, the new building rose during the first years of the Great Depression. In 1930, the Convention Hall became a weapon in an almost Darwinian struggle between American cities for limited commercial resources.

The construction of the new convention hall was an event of no uncertain significance for the city. As citizens followed the hall's progress over the airwaves and in the newspapers, their hopes must have risen to think that Philadelphia would at last have its own public palace—or at the very least, yet another substantial public works project. In his dissertation on Depression relief work in Philadelphia, John Francis Bauman points out that Mayor Mackey “welcomed” President Herbert

Hoover's plea for cities to engage in public works. In 1930-32, Philadelphia awarded \$64,132,000 worth of contracts for such projects as the Schuylkill River Development Plan (bridges, river drives), Roosevelt Parkway, Broad Street and Locust Street Subways, Benjamin Franklin Bridge, and a number of wharves and terminals. Also underway in the early 1930s were new buildings for federal institutions like the Federal Reserve Bank (1931-35), Federal Courthouse, U.S. Customs House, and main Post Office. Monumental construction projects, private or public, told citizens that Philadelphia and the nation at large remained strong, confident, and committed to the public good.²⁸

Work began on the new building on 1 February 1930. Most of the caissons were set that spring, and the tremendous steel framework rose atop the granite base that summer. By 14 October, workmen had almost completed sheathing the skeleton in Indiana limestone, pouring the cement floors, and installing the roof. That day, the chairman of the executive committee of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce addressed an invitation-only luncheon at the Commercial Museum. With the half-completed Convention Hall visible out the windows, Julius H. Barnes spoke of "periods of recession and rebuilding" and promised that "the structure of American business has not collapsed." Later that afternoon, a modest crowd gathered to watch Mayor Mackey lay the cornerstone of Convention Hall.²⁹

As the construction progressed into 1931 ahead of schedule, only the execution of the details—specifically, the carved decorations—posed a problem. The Art Jury did not receive any detailed renderings of the figurative friezes until May 1930—at least a month after the sculpture firm of Brockhouse & Kerner had commenced work. After visiting the South Philadelphia studio, Art Jury members Paul Cret and Guiseppe Donato reported back to the Jury about the sculptors' disagreeable personalities and the "entirely unsatisfactory" system of production.

Brockhouse & Kerner were expected to create their scale plaster models from an artist's painting (rather than a small three-dimensional rendition) of the frieze. Cret complained that "The use of backgrounds, the foreshortening of the figures, are altogether different in the two mediums." The Art Jury rejected the proposed design, and offered Johnson "the recommendation that a competent sculptor be employed to design these friezes."³⁰

Unfortunately, the architect disregarded the advice. Brockhouse & Kerner's scale models were shipped to Indiana, where two different stonecarving firms translated the designs into limestone. When the pieces arrived in Philadelphia for installation, several significant mistakes were noticed (*fig. 36*). There were problems of geography in the four continent panels: among others, a mountain range across the Sahara; the absence of two Great Lakes; an ocelot-shaped Asia; the disappearance of Madagascar; and a Greenland that hovered over Alaska. There were also problems of orthography ("Stakowski" rather than "Tchaikovsky") and appropriate period dress (Verdi's big "Uncle Sam hat"). John Brockhouse and the two Indiana firms blamed one another—though the misspelling probably implicates a Philadelphia fan of Orchestra conductor Leopold Stokowski. In an article about the various carving blunders, a reporter for the *Public Record* demanded, "[W]hat is the city of Philadelphia going to do, now that these mistakes have been carved deeply into the walls of the new \$5,000,000 Convention Hall, 34th St. below Pine?"³¹

To their credit, the builders did complete construction of the convention hall two months ahead of their original schedule within cost. They had only final touches to apply by 8 June 1931, when the Municipal Auditorium welcomed its first convention, the 82nd annual session of the American Medical Association. A total of 2000 booths and kiosks displayed scientific exhibits in the basement exhibition hall and technical exhibits in the auditorium floor (*fig. 37*), while the ballroom provided

the setting for lectures and films. To the delight of the mayor, the Chamber of Commerce, the architect, and the hall's new trustees, the first event was declared a success by its most important critic. Conventioneer Dr. Morris Fishbein commented:

It is a wonderful building, and we have been struck with the fact that Philadelphia has avoided the errors that have been made in the construction of convention halls by other cities. We were able to hold all of our sessions and house the very large scientific and technical exhibits under one roof, and that will be a determining consideration for organizations seeking a convention city.³²

Though most Philadelphians would have to wait another three months to see the new hall, they would be rewarded by the grand public opening.

➤ *At the new Convention Hall*

It is useful to view the Municipal Auditorium in light of Philadelphia's contemporary comprehensive planning programs, which also originated in the 1910s and 1920s but were not formally implemented until the 1930s. In *The Private City*, Sam Bass Warner points out that during the first few decades of the 20th century, the city's attempts at planning focused on discrete areas like the Parkway, the Park, and the river drives. Most projects were "downtown-oriented" and intended "to bring traffic to the downtown, to beautify it, and to raise or maintain downtown business property values."³³

Comprehensive planning efforts at an urban level was signaled by the creation of the Zoning and Planning Commissions in the late 1920s. These entities provided Philadelphia with a set of general tools, laws, and authority with which to regulate development throughout the city. The most ambitious of the new planning efforts was the organization of the Regional Planning Federation of the Tri-State Metropolitan Area of Philadelphia in 1924. The aim of this collaboration of professionals and businessmen was to develop a program for the "coordinate planning and orderly development of the region contiguous to and including Philadelphia, Wilmington, Trenton, and Camden." Their anticipated *Regional Plan*

(1932) prescribed the informed preservation of existing resources and the planning of “major physical facilities” for the metropolitan area’s common welfare.³⁴

Regrettably, the *Regional Plan* makes only passing mention of convention halls. In the chapter on “Architectural and Aesthetic Elements,” a photograph of San Antonio’s Municipal Auditorium (1928) spotlights the use of local decorative styles and elevated siting—two elements lacking at Philadelphia’s convention hall. A minor comment in a litany of planning oversights deprecates “convention halls covering entire blocks without adequate approaches”³⁵—also a problem for the great complex of buildings in West Philadelphia. While the *Regional Plan* discusses buildings and infrastructure on a scale from local (elementary schools) to urban (civic centers) to regional (highways), it shies away from the convention hall in general and avoids mention entirely of Philadelphia’s new Municipal Auditorium. Perhaps there was a sense that such buildings were more closely linked with private enterprise rather than public works and with urban concerns rather than regional needs.

How would one measure the success of Philadelphia’s Municipal Auditorium? After twenty years of deliberation and conflict, it was built without major complications and within the prescribed budget. Its program realized an effective combination of spaces, an acoustically-sound auditorium, a battery of modern equipment, and elegant interior finishes. It succeeded as a discrete architectural object. On the other hand, management arrangements had to be made. It had yet to be determined if Convention Hall’s West Philadelphia location would be convenient in terms of transportation. A schedule of rentals was just beginning to take shape. Furthermore, it remained to be seen how the new building would integrate with how Philadelphia promoted itself during the 1930s.

From the beginning, there were staff problems and concerns about integration with the Commercial Museum. In April 1931, the Commercial Museum protested

Mayor Mackey's proposal to consolidate the management of the Convention Hall, Municipal Stadium, and the exhibition buildings of the Commercial Museum. Museum officials resented that all moneys for the convention hall exclusively funded its construction and contributed nothing towards renovations of the rest of the complex.³⁶ An *Evening Bulletin* editorialist described the museum's buildings as "shabby and dilapidated" and "antiquated firetraps."³⁷ Moreover, museum officials wanted to retain control of rentals of their exhibition facilities, which by the 1920s represented their biggest income source. Meanwhile, the Bureau of Convention Hall and Stadium was created within the Department of Public Works. Mackey tapped the former manager of St. Louis's Coliseum to head the Bureau's staff. The Bureau chief reported to a Board of Managers (headed by Pennsylvania Railroad vice-president Eysmans) that consisted largely of leading merchants whose businesses catered to convention visitors.³⁸

The Commercial Museum's fortunes had been in decline since the early 1920s. Severely reduced exhibition budgets caused staff to retain older displays, which in turn failed to attract new groups of schoolchildren. Around the same time, the Foreign Trade Bureau witnessed a drop in its income; the Federal Government's Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce (within the Department of Commerce) and private firms could provide the same services to businessmen. Small budgets meant for little or no maintenance and decreased staffing, which further impaired the health of the institution. By retaining control of their exhibition rentals, the Commercial Museum held a bargaining chip. Ironically, the result was a grudging competition between Convention Hall and the Commercial Museum for the same trade shows. Historian Ruth Hunter explains that the rivalry even reached a point where "Convention Hall management forbade the Museum personnel to walk from the North to the Center Building through Convention Hall property."³⁹

The return of fiscal conservative J. Hampton Moore to the mayor's office in 1932 doomed many public works programs. Moore's campaign against Mackey targeted "unprofitable" public construction efforts like the municipal airport, the Broad Street Subway, and Convention Hall, which he branded "an unnecessary and losing venture."⁴⁰ In the depths of the Depression, the new mayor suspended all subway projects (upon the completion of ongoing contracts), discontinued work on the municipal airport, and prepared to restructure the Convention Hall administration. Already there were incidents of mismanaged funds and reports of missed opportunities to bring conventions to Philadelphia. Moore's solution entailed firing the manager (thus eliminating an expensive \$10,000 annual salary), delegating the stadium's management to the Bureau of City Property, and establishing a new Board of Trustees of the Philadelphia Commercial Museum, Exhibitions, and Convention Hall.⁴¹

On paper, the new arrangement appeared satisfactory. A single board of trustees would make decisions, and a single staff would be responsible for management, promotion, services, maintenance, and other functions. Unfortunately, Moore's plan expanded the membership of the Board of Trustees but did not increase staff numbers. The already overextended crew at the Commercial Museum could hardly maintain all the museum buildings as well as the immense new hall. Additionally, the integration of the complex's mechanical and electrical services, though proposed by Johnson, had yet to be realized. To make matters worse, Moore reduced the city's annual contribution to the combined budget from \$151,085.42 to \$116,506 in expectation that the expensive Convention Hall would turn a profit.⁴²

As expected, Convention Hall did generate \$73,000 of revenue in 1932. Operations and maintenance demands were eased somewhat at mid-decade by an infusion of Civil Works Administration labor and later by Works Progress

Administration labor. Hall rentals averaged a modest \$50,000 annually during the 1930's. Even if the Commercial Museum's facilities were deteriorating rapidly and even if the automobile traffic generated by special events was atrocious, audiences enjoyed attending functions at Convention Hall. Just the sumptuous interior features, the grand expanses of the exhibition halls, and the crowds that filled the auditorium made for a lively experience when times were tough. Convention Hall offered up its empty spaces for use by almost any group for almost any occasion.⁴³ The varied rentals can be divided into four categories: public assemblies, entertainment events, trade shows, and national conventions.

As a place of public assembly, Convention Hall fulfilled its most straightforwardly civic function. Its permanent interior decorations graced every event with the iconography of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania. Much of the decorative plasterwork was painted the city's blue and gold colors, and every permanent seat in the arena and almost every door's keyplate in the building was embossed with the city's seal. These details and the grand space made the hall the logical location for public municipal events like mayoral inaugurations or the celebration of the 250th anniversary of William Penn's arrival in Philadelphia.⁴⁴ At the same time, these elements lent an air of civic legitimacy to the events that special interest groups held at Convention Hall. Whether the event was a university commencement or a veterans' dinner, a Catholic mass or an Elks' dance, each rental party could make the city's ceremonial space its own, if just for a night.

As a locale for athletic and cultural events, the building provided the city with a multi-purpose entertainment center. The auditorium also had been fitted with a \$60,000 Möller "Artiste" organ and two consoles, as well as a film projection booth. Furnished with the latest in theatrical equipment, the vast stage could accommodate orchestras, dramatic performances, and other musical events (*fig. 38*). Whereas many

of Philadelphia's other substantial auditoriums had graded floors and/or fixed seats, Convention Hall's arena layout was convenient for the presentation of sporting events. Once the temporary seats were cleared, workers could install a boxing ring, foot or bicycle track, or tennis and basketball courts. The floor also provided an appropriate space for circuses, dog shows, Mummers' performances, and large-scale pageants.⁴⁵

As a location for trade shows, Convention Hall served commercial aims. Complicated events to mount, trade shows made the most use of the building's extensive features. First of all, these events often required various combinations of display space available in the arena, basement exhibition hall, and the exhibition areas in the Commercial Museum's Grand Exhibition Hall, South Building, and Center Building. They also required the use of the truck entrances and train siding for loading and unloading exhibits and equipment. The trade shows transformed the various spaces into showcases for the latest products and services offered by national and local businesses. Derived from the same cultural-commercial ethic that inspired the world's fair exhibitions and the Commercial Museum's exhibits, these events used the appealing display of new commodities to educate and entice the public (*fig. 39*). Each of the hundreds of booths functioned like a museum exhibit, accompanied by a salesperson or trade representative as interactive interpreter. The vast amount of goods concentrated in the various halls turned Convention Hall into a temple of abundance. Flower shows, home shows, electrical appliance shows all relied on the power of the special event to sell seemingly mundane consumer products.

Finally, as a destination for national conventions, Convention Hall largely excluded Philadelphians as participants and recast them as service providers. Fulfilling the wishes of the Chamber of Commerce, the building produced revenue for

local businesses by attracting out-of-town delegates to stay and spend money in the city. The building's popularity aided Philadelphia's national and international aspirations. Every national convention held at Convention Hall spotlighted Philadelphia as the temporary national capital of that given profession, organization, club, or political party. Not only the building but the city itself served as the host (thus, "host city") to the thousands of delegates who flooded area attractions and downtown restaurants, hotels, and bars. And for those Philadelphians who could participate in the conventions as doctors, Baptists, or Democrats (or all three), the event reinforced their cosmopolitan status.

Of all the events held at similar facilities across the country, the most coveted were the national political conventions. American cities competed not only for the tremendous revenue such events guaranteed but also for the attendant political privilege and free advertising. By securing the Democratic National Convention for 1936, Philadelphia and Pennsylvania politicians earned the opportunity to broadcast their constituencies' needs before a national audience of delegates, federal politicians, and the general public.⁴⁶

Like the many other functions that took place at Convention Hall, the political convention required the decoration of the building's interior and exterior. The Democrats in 1936 and 1948, the Republicans in 1940 and 1948, and the Progressives in 1948 decked the Convention Hall with red, white, and blue bunting; presidential seals; donkeys and elephants; American flags and eagles and any other trimmings displaying national iconography (*fig. 40*). On the arena floor, the delegates clustered around handpainted signs announcing their home states (*fig. 41*). These signs boldly proclaimed origins (RHODE ISLAND, TEXAS, WASHINGTON) and strongly resembled those signs posted in international commercial displays at a world's fair or

the Commercial Museum (FIJI, MEXICO, DENMARK). The national political convention also presented a great exhibition—of political ambition.⁴⁷

The example of the national political conventions clearly demonstrates how Convention Hall became the setting for significant events. In Convention Hall, whether during private conversations in the corridors, through deals made in smoke-filled committee rooms, or in the formal process on the arena floor, presidential candidates were nominated and history was made. The national conventions closely identified the events with the building. For example, Mayor Bernard Samuel advertised the 1940 Republican National Convention by posting the following sign facing the railroad tracks behind the building:

PHILADELPHIA CONVENTION HALL
IN THIS BUILDING
OUR NEXT PRESIDENT WILL BE NOMINATED

The elections proved the mayor wrong: Republican candidate Wendell Wilkie failed to unseat incumbent President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1940. Still, the sign pointed out the expectations aroused in Philadelphians for the great moments that could take place within their Convention Hall. Even the September 1931 official public “opening” of a building already open caused a sensation. As the following quotation from the 1937 *WPA Guide to Philadelphia* suggests, audiences from around the country came to Convention Hall to see things happen:

It has been the scene of diverse events from the athletic to the esthetic; from the spectacular to the commonplace. . . . Yearly more than 2,000,000 persons, exceeding Philadelphia’s entire population, have witnessed the dances, contests, luncheons, graduations, tennis matches, automobile shows, political rallies, concerts, dog shows, boxing and wrestling bouts, and folk pageants flowing endlessly through this great coliseum of the twentieth century.⁴⁸

The author describes a space defined by activity—a structure that contains the spirit of the era.

Endnotes: Chapter 3

- ¹ "Defends Diversion Of Fund For Hall," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* (hereafter *EB*), 17 Oct. 1927.
- ² "Convention Hall Begun By Mayor," *EB*, 7 Jan. 1930.
- ³ "Gay Fete At Debut Of Convention Hall," *Philadelphia Inquirer* (hereafter *PI*), 28 Jul. 1931; "Songfest To Open City's Auditorium," *EB*, 17 Sep. 1931; "Convention Hall Officially Opens," *EB*, 18 Sep. 1931; Harry A. Mackey, "Philadelphia's New Auditorium," *American City* 45, no. 5 (Nov. 1931): 105.
- ⁴ "Defends Diversion Of Funds For Hall," *EB*, 17 Oct. 1927; John Francis Bauman, "The City, The Depression, and Relief: The Philadelphia Experience: 1929-1939" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers—The State Univ., 1969), 3-4.
- ⁵ Ruth H. Hunter, *The Trade and Convention Center of Philadelphia: Its Birth and Renascence* (Philadelphia: City of Philadelphia, 1962), 56.
- ⁶ Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, *Annual Report* 21 (1916), 8-16; *Ibid.* 22 (1917), 29; *Ibid.* 31 (1926), 22; *Ibid.* 30 (1927), 21-25.
- ⁷ Dan Rottenberg, "The Rise of Albert M. Greenfield," in *Jewish Life in Philadelphia, 1830-1940*, ed. Murray Friedman (Philadelphia: ISHI Publications, 1983), 213-34.
- ⁸ Chamber of Commerce and Charles B. Hall as quoted in "Plan To Sidetrack Hall Is Flayed By Chamber," *PI*, 17 Oct. 1927.
- ⁹ Harry A. Mackey as quoted in "Defends Diversion Of Fund For Hall," *EB*, 17 Oct. 1927.
- ¹⁰ "Mayor Favors Museum Site For New Convention Hall," *EB*, 23 Jan. 1928; "Hall To Cost Only \$2,000,000 Plan of Mayor," *PI*, 26 Jan. 1928; "Convention Hall Committee Named," *EB*, 14 Feb. 1928; "Convention Hall For 34th & Pine," *EB*, 26 Apr. 1928.
- ¹¹ "Would Use Museum As Convention Hall," no cite, 1 Mar. 1917, *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* News Clipping Collection, Urban Archives, Temple University (hereafter *BTU*); "City To Use Museum As Convention Hall," no cite, 7 Feb. 1918, *BTU*; "Convention Hall Of Museum Urged," *Philadelphia Evening Ledger* (hereafter *EL*), 28 Feb. 1924; "City Offered Museum Land For Auditorium," no cite, [1924-27?], *BTU*; "Favors Convention Hall Near Commercial Museum," *EB*, 19 Oct. 1927.
- ¹² William P. Wilson as quoted in "Convention Hall Of Museum Urged," *EL*, 28 Feb. 1924.
- ¹³ Edward Hopkinson, Jr. as quoted in "Penn Offers 17-Acre Tract For Hall Site," *PI*, 15 Feb. 1928.
- ¹⁴ "Convention Hall To Be Erected At 34th And Pine Sts.," *PI*, 26 Apr. 1928; University of Pennsylvania Trustees, *Minutes*, XIX: 297; Edward Potts Cheyney, *History of the University of Pennsylvania, 1740-1940* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania, Press, 1940), 395-96.
- ¹⁵ "Mackey Asks Auditorium Plans From Cleveland Man," *EB*, 11 May 1928; "Reveals Johnson as Architect for Convention Hall," *EB*, 3 Aug. 1928; "Convention Hall Contract Signed; Architect to Get Fee of \$300,000," *Philadelphia Public Ledger* (hereafter *PL*), 10 Oct. 1928. Like all previous attempts, Wilson's effort to negate Johnson's contract went nowhere.
- ¹⁶ Obituary for Philip H. Johnson, *Architectural Forum* 60, no. 1 (Jan. 1934): 22 (editorial section); Sandra L. Tatman and Roger W. Moss, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1985), 418-421; Philip H. Johnson, "Now My Idea Is This! On Municipal Architecture in the Years to Come," *PL*, 17 Jan. 1925.
- ¹⁷ "Rule of Kendrick Enriches Johnson," no cite, [ca. 1925], City Architect's Scrapbook, Philadelphia City Archives; Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, *WPA Guide to Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 381; Johnson, "Now My Idea Is This! On Municipal Architecture in the Years to Come," *PL*, 17 Jan. 1925.
- ¹⁸ "The City Architect," *PL*, 14 Jan. 1928.
- ¹⁹ Tatman and Moss, *Biographical*, 418-21.
- ²⁰ "Mackey to Seek New Hall Design," *Philadelphia Public Record* (hereafter *PR*), 11 Sep. 1928; "The Cleveland Auditorium," *American Architect* 119 (1921): 21-25; "Convention Hall

Plans Discussed," *EB*, 26 Nov. 1928; "Exhibition Hall Plans Submitted," no cite, 20 Dec. 1928, BTU; "New Hall To Seat 15,000," *EB*, 20 Dec. 1928.

²¹ "Plans For Huge Hall Approved; To Seat 13,000," *PL*, 3 Feb. 1929.

²² "Convention Hall Plans Submitted," *EB*, 22 Aug. 19; "Convention Hall Here Will Surpass All Others In U.S.," *PI*, 6 Jan. 1929; "Phila.'s Auditorium To Lead All In U.S.," no cite, 23 Dec. 1928, BTU; "Plans For Huge Hall Approved; To Seat 13,000," *PL*, 3 Feb. 1929.

²³ "Convention Hall Plans Explained By Architect," *EL*, 5 Apr. 1929; "Convention Hall Bids To Be Sought," *EL*, 9 Jul. 1929 "Convention Hall Bids Soon," *EB*, 31 Jul. 1929; "Convention Hall Low Bid \$6,068,247," *EB*, 12 Nov. 1929; "Convention Hall Bids Are Rejected," *EB*, 16 Nov. 1929; "Convention Hall Bids Within Limit," *PI*, 11 Dec. 1929. Albert M. Greenfield also made a radio appearance to promote Convention Hall. See "Greenfield Boosts Convention Hall," *Philadelphia Public Record* (hereafter *PR*), 25 Feb. 1930.

²⁴ Samuel L. Ware and D.D. Eames, "Construction and Equipment of the Atlantic City Convention Hall," *Architectural Forum* 59, no. 3 (Aug. 1929): 237-44; Art Jury, file #2158, PCA.

²⁵ Walter Raymond Agard, *The New Architectural Sculpture* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1935).

²⁶ Art Jury, file #2158, PCA.

²⁷ "Convention Hall Begun By Mayor," *EB*, 7 Jan. 1930.

²⁸ Arthur D. Gayer, *Public Works in Prosperity and Depression*, Publications of the National Bureau of Economic Research, no. 29 (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1935), 188-89; Bauman, "The City, The Depression, and Relief," 41; Margaret B. Tinkcom, "Depression and War: 1929-1946" in Russell F. Weigley, ed., *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), 602-604.

²⁹ "\$5,000,000 Hall Rushed to Fill Dream Of City," *PL*, 27 Apr. 1930; "Convention Hall Work Moves Fast," *EB*, 15 Jul. 1930; "Convention Hall Ahead Of Schedule," *PI*, 14 Sep. 1930; "Convention Hall Ready By Apr. 1," *PL*, 27 Sep. 1930; "Convention Hall Cornerstone Laid," *EB*, 14 Oct. 1930.

³⁰ Art Jury, file #2158, PCA; "Rotogravure Pictorial Section: Making Models For Stone Decorations On New Convention Hall," *Philadelphia Sunday Ledger*, 20 Apr. 1930; "Art Jury Rejects Auditorium Frieze," *EB*, 9 Feb. 1931.

³¹ "To Fix Map Errors In Convention Hall," *EB*, 2 Mar. 1931; "Hall Sculptors to Erase Errors," *EL*, 2 Mar. 1931; "Artistic License," *EL*, 19 Mar. 1931; "American Geog. Awry In Convention Hall Carving; Only 3 Great Lakes Shown," *PR*, 1 Mar. 1931.

³² Morris Fishbein as quoted in "Convention Hall Delights Doctors," *PL*, 14 Jun. 1931.

³³ Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of its Growth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), 206-09.

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³⁵ *Ibid.*, 326, 303-36.

³⁶ "Mayor's Hall Plan Facing Opposition," *EB*, 10 Apr. 1931; "Reach Convention Hall Compromise," *EB*, 15 Apr. 1931.

³⁷ "Men and Things," *EB*, 8 May 1931.

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³⁹ Hunter, *Trade and Convention Center*, 52, 55-59; Philadelphia Commercial Museum, *Annual Report*, 1930, 3-10.

⁴⁰ J. Hampton Moore as quoted in "Mackey Defends Convention Hall," *EB*, 23 Oct. 1931.

⁴¹ Tinkcom, "Depression and War" in *Philadelphia*, Weigley, ed., 611; "Convention Hall Transfer Is Asked," *EB*, 11 Feb. 1932; "Hotelmen Attack City Rule Of Hall," *EB*, 7 Jun. 1932; "Convention Hall Merger Is Urged," *EB*, 13 Jun. 1932; "Convention Hall Change Approved,"

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⁴² Philadelphia Museums: The Commercial Museum and the Municipal Auditorium, *Annual Report*, 1933-34, 2-7, 12.

⁴³ Hunter, *Trade and Convention Center*, 60; "Planning Jobs for 35,000 Philadelphians on Federally aided Civic Improvements," *EB*, 23 Nov. 1932; "Obtains \$1,900,000 WPA Fund For City," *EB*, n.d., BTU; "Convention Hall Parking Assailed," *EL*, 2 Nov. 1931. Not all interested parties could use Convention Hall: the Trustees rejected the Russian National Mutual Aid Society of America's 1934 application to rent the hall for memorial services for Lenin. See "Convention Hall Closed To Reds," *EB*, 15 Dec. 1934.

⁴⁴ Philadelphia Museums, *Annual Report*, 1930, 9.

⁴⁵ *The Philadelphia Municipal Auditorium* (Philadelphia: City of Philadelphia, 1931).

⁴⁶ "G.O.P. Chiefs Land Convention Hall," *EB*, 23 Feb. 1940.

⁴⁷ "Convention Plans Satisfy Leaders," *EB*, 13 Jan. 1936; "Convention Hall To Be Like Beacon," *EB*, 12 Jun. 1936; "Convention Hall Set for History," *Bulletin*, 19 Jun. 1948; "3rd Party Picks This City, Too," *EB*, 12 Apr. 1948.

⁴⁸ Federal Writers' Project, *WPA Guide to Philadelphia*, 494.

Conclusion

The genesis of Convention Hall describes Philadelphia's struggle to give form and place to an institution that expressed civic ideals and at the same time served the city's many interests. Its foundations were laid with the chartering of the Commercial Museum at the end of the 19th century. As a prototype for a convention hall, the Museum attempted to express the commercial and educational goals of the era's world's fairs in a permanent municipal institution. When Philadelphia government began to assume a more active role in city planning under Mayor John Reyburn in 1909, the city flirted with dozens of proposals for a public hall. A twenty-year parade of locations, programs, and architectural forms reflected the diverse expectations for such a building. Structures for commerce, for ceremony, and for community were advanced and withdrawn. The struggle culminated when Convention Hall was constructed on the grounds of the Commercial Museum in 1929.

By presenting the history of Philadelphia's Convention Hall, I have argued for the recognition of the municipal convention hall as a building type on the American urban landscape of the early 20th century. Although this thesis is not a history of the convention hall building type per se, it does offer Philadelphia's example as a starting point for more general inquiry. Both Dolores Hayden and Abigail Van Slyck have pointed out that the histories of familiar urban buildings need attention.¹ Vernacular architecture studies have largely focused on the rural, the local, and the home-spun, while architectural history often addresses the cosmopolitan, the high-style, and the avant-garde. Van Slyck suggests that some building types "fall through the methodological gap" between the two disciplines². Municipal convention halls, for example, were designed by both elite architects and little-known city employees. A rigorous application of the questions and approaches of vernacular architecture

studies and architectural history can begin to explain the history of this familiar urban building type.

For example, cultural geography helps to establish patterns of regional and national diffusion for a given building type. I found that the best source for studying convention halls in national perspective is a magazine entitled *The American City*, which began publication in 1909. This periodical documented numerous municipal buildings that were proposed and erected across the country (fig. 42). A selective glance at its pages reveals that Pasadena, Memphis, and Toledo erected municipal auditoriums; Atlantic City, Detroit, and Philadelphia put up convention halls; Baltimore, Providence, and Sacramento constructed memorial auditoriums (or Victory Halls); smaller cities like Wheeling, Roanoke, and Wichita built market-auditoriums. Patterns appear and provoke questions. For example, were state capitols obligated to erect veterans' auditoriums? Were agricultural communities more likely to combine their market facilities with public halls? How did the programs of these buildings differ? In 1937, *The American City* reported that in the past two years, almost fifty municipal auditoriums had been erected in "cities" from Primrose, Nebraska (pop. 210) to Kansas City, Missouri (pop. 399,746).³

Convention halls were not isolated phenomena; in fact, a national dialogue sprang up between politicians, architects, planners, and conventioners. Cities sought the advice of experts like Warren G. Laird, who organized design competitions for public auditoriums, and J. Harold MacDowell, the architect of Cleveland's Public Auditorium. Periodicals like *The American City* and *American Architect* published these Victory Halls, convention halls, public auditoriums, market-auditoriums, and auditorium-armories for an audience of architects, planners, and civic boosters.⁴ Newspaper articles (such as Will Rogers's serialized column) and radio broadcasts brought home news of national conventions and the buildings they occupied. The

lineage of the some of the larger convention halls demonstrates this national exchange. The great halls of the 1920s, such as Atlantic City's Convention Hall and Cleveland's Public Auditorium, served as models for Philadelphia's Convention Hall (1929-31), which in turn influenced St. Louis's and Kansas City's Municipal Auditoriums, both built in the 1930s.⁵

A material culture studies methodology may investigate the stuff of which convention halls were made. In the early 20th century, the wood, plaster, and chicken wire architecture of world's fairs and temporary auditoriums was rebuilt with steel frames and masonry. Another look at the pages of *The American City* reveals that the convention halls of many American metropolises were sheathed in buff-colored limestone. The stone's aesthetic and practical qualities made it an apt choice for monumental architecture during the period between the wars (*fig. 43*). Issues pertaining to materials and technology are closely bound. From a technological standpoint, the great auditoriums of convention halls were made possible by developments in roof structure, fireproof construction, and acoustical science. Convention halls also implemented on a massive scale new building systems like air conditioning, amplification, and special effects lighting.⁶

A design history of convention halls may trace the program of this building type as it evolved from the individual gathering place to the collection of linked spaces. While the convention hall was a specific building type, its plan had to be flexible enough to accommodate diverse uses and audiences. The growing list of specialized spatial needs ranged from ballrooms to loading docks, restaurants to projection booths. Another architectural query focuses on how plan and exterior wrapper contributed to the familiar form of the convention hall: a symmetrical, boxy mass with a large-span roof and a monumental entrance. An aesthetic evaluation may highlight the architectural styles used to decorate these buildings. The

exuberantly classicizing modes promoted by the City Beautiful movement typically gave way to regionalism and stripped classicism in the 1920s and 30s. Though this stylistic succession characterizes a lot of public architecture of the period, a related topic focuses on the architectural sculpture that adorned convention halls. Which sculptural styles and what subject matter best expressed municipal ideologies?

In addition to studying the prominent architects who have designed convention halls, architectural histories can also call attention to the careers of the supposedly invisible city architects who standardized a vocabulary of public building types. Through auditoriums, bathhouses, fire stations, and playgrounds, these prolific and versatile designers gave physical form to city services. By definition, city architects shaped public space. A related inquiry can examine the role of city and regional planning in determining the locations of convention halls. Adherents of the City Beautiful movement often included public auditoriums in their plans for civic centers, while other planners conceived these buildings independently of such groups. One also might consider what private groups within the city helped make decisions about convention hall location, plan, and design.

Vernacular architecture studies and architectural history provide numerous ways of evaluating the history of the municipal convention hall, but these disciplines may err in on the side of treating buildings as artifacts. Therefore, it is useful to apply cultural studies and social history to the study of architecture. Van Slyck demands that "we must look at all buildings as evidence of social processes in which a variety of attitudes are negotiated in specific social and cultural settings."⁷ Thus the evolution of materials, technologies, architectural programs, decorative styles, and planning strategies reflect a similar evolution of cultural values and social needs. The histories of convention halls can be written in terms of such trends as the commodification of leisure, the rise of municipal government, the role of business

interests in the shaping of American cities, or the search for extra-familial and secular allegiances.

Where an architectural historian may distinguish designers from clients, a social historian sees only designers. Politicians, business interests, real estate owners, art commissions, educators, and citizens contribute to the design of a building. In Chapter 2, I recounted how taxpayer's suits brought the construction of two proposed convention halls to a dead halt. In fact, these suits played a significant role in the piecemeal development of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. Other participants in the creation of urban architecture include zoning and building code writers, suppliers, building inspectors, builders, and artisans.⁸ As is evidenced by the mistakes of geography and orthography carved into the walls of Convention Hall, sometimes the details command more attention than the building itself.

And while an architectural historian can end her narrative once the building's construction is complete, the social historian can begin his at the very same moment. To put it plainly, one perspective celebrates the building before anyone sets foot in it, and the other celebrates the feet. A survey of the millions of visitors to convention halls reveals which populations made use of these presumably public spaces and which were excluded. The public gets defined as a collection of overlapping interest groups, allegiances, and identities who can define spaces just by inhabiting spaces. Events like political and professional conventions, group meetings, club dances, and school commencements situate users as both spectators and protagonists in human dramas that unfold within the building's walls. The social meanings of the convention hall are constructed by the people who use it.

Alternatively, it is possible to situate events (such as political conventions and festivals) as the designers of convention halls. Although this argument may appear to present a chicken-and-egg conundrum (people organize events organize

people), it does explain the social function of the convention hall building type.

Municipal convention halls, temporary or permanent, were built to contain events. In Philadelphia, John Windrim designed the Grand Assembly Center in 1910 and Carl Berger designed a temporary convention hall (or Saengerfest-Halle) in 1912 for the same “client,” the 23rd National Saengerfest. One of the few secondary sources on convention culture, R. Craig Sautter and Edward M. Burke’s *Inside the Wigwam: Chicago Presidential Conventions, 1860-1996* catalogs the twenty-five presidential nominating conventions held in Chicago. They found that Chicago and its many convention settings have served as a stage for national political drama.⁹ The corollary to the events argument follows: if convention halls thrive on activity, they endure only as long as they can attract a large number of rentals.

Of all the perspectives that explain the genesis of the municipal convention hall, the events-as-designers model may be the most compelling. In the preceding pages, I have attempted to canonize convention halls in the catalog of American building types. This has prepared me to ask what truly defines the convention hall, its physical form or its cultural use. In many respects, the convention hall’s symbolic ancestors are the great fairs of the turn-of-the-century. While many international exposition buildings were fantastically decorated, and their state fair counterparts were more utilitarian, each structure was shaped by the event it contained and the cultural moment it celebrated. The pavilions, exhibition halls, auditoriums, midways, and amusements showcased intense instants of achievement, and then the fairs closed. Most of the temporary structures came down, the permanent buildings were mothballed, and the public awaited the next occasion. Without the presence of activity, fair architecture is just a bunch of empty boxes.

Such is the present condition of the Philadelphia Civic Center. After its grand opening in 1931, Convention Hall and the Commercial Museum endured twenty years

of laissez-faire management. In the early 1950s, the Board of Trade and Conventions appointed a new regime and launched a substantial modernization campaign of what they called the Trade and Convention Center of Philadelphia. By 1967, the old Grand Exhibition Hall and South Building had been replaced with a new version designed by Edward Durrell Stone. The entire complex (which would include Pennsylvania Hall by 1978) was again renamed the Philadelphia Civic Center, and the museum became the Civic Center Museum (*fig. 44*).¹⁰ These name changes make an ironic commentary on the legacy of the City Beautiful movement; civic centers, arts centers, government centers, sports centers, and cultural centers of the second half of the century typically mark specialized nodes of activity within increasingly decentralized cities.¹¹

Another one of these new center types (not building types) is the convention center: a megastructure that expands the program of the convention-oriented civic center with the addition of hotel, restaurant, retail, and office facilities.¹² City planner Alexander Garvin comments that “Cities invest in convention centers because they think they are municipal money-making machines.”¹³ Income-strapped Philadelphia was no exception. A study produced by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission in 1982 identified six potential locations—all in Center City—for a new convention center. Eleven years later, Mayor Ed Rendell and Governor Tom Ridge formally opened the new \$522 million, 1.3 million square foot Pennsylvania Convention Center at 1101 Arch Street.¹⁴

The Philadelphia Civic Center closed its doors after hosting a professional wrestling match in June 1996. Since then, the Civic Center Museum’s collections have been removed to an off-site location and may be distributed among area museums. When I first considered writing about Convention Hall, I was told that the buildings had been abandoned and their utilities turned off. This was not the case. As I toured

the interiors with the site manager, we observed that Convention Hall was in good condition if a little dingy. Most of the decorative finishes and furnishings—chandeliers, pressed terra cotta panels, ornamental plasterwork, metal grilles—had worn well. I imagined that at any given moment, the front doors would be thrown open, crowds would stream in, and a special event would get underway.

For now, the spaces inside Convention Hall and the larger Civic Center complex are quiet (*fig. 45*). In 1994, the *Welcomat* reported that the City wants to sell the property, and probably the University of Pennsylvania is the only paying customer.¹⁵ In fact, the University may have a legal claim to the site. The 1916 Pennsylvania Supreme Court decision found that the Commercial Museum Board (city government) controlled the property “so long as the land and buildings are in good faith used for the purpose of the museum.”¹⁶ Absent the museum’s institutional presence, the property may revert to the University, which has expressed interest in developing an athletic center or additional hospital facilities there. Meanwhile, the Philadelphia Film Commission has been exploring the possibility of making the vast spaces of the Civic Center available as soundstages for film production companies shooting on location in Philadelphia.¹⁷ It is too early to tell if future plans for the site would preserve the Convention Hall, the Civic Center Museum, or any of the other buildings; however, Mayor Rendell’s former chief of staff David L. Cohen predicted in 1993, “That museum will be rubble.”¹⁸

The Museum building is listed on the Philadelphia Register, and both the Museum and Convention Hall have been surveyed and deemed eligible for the National Register.¹⁹ It appears, however, that the Philadelphia Historic Commission is sitting this battle out. One could make a number of arguments on behalf of preserving Convention Hall. For example, it satisfies three of four National Register criteria for historic significance;²⁰ it is operational and in good repair; it offers a

relatively central 13,500 seat arena. Nonetheless, as the authors of *Changing Places: ReMaking Institutional Buildings*, point out, “[T]he questions framed for discussion about [historically significant institutional] buildings and landscapes are most likely to be ‘How can we use them?’ and ‘What are they good for?’; not ‘What are they?’ and ‘What do they mean?’”²¹

For the sixty-five years between 1931 and 1996, Philadelphia’s Convention Hall was a space for civic assembly and a structure for a continuous parade of events. Even before the building was constructed, the idea of the building was enough to house the political, commercial, social, and cultural aspirations of the city. It may prove difficult to preserve the architectural fabric of Convention Hall or of the larger Philadelphia Civic Center; however, preservation does take other forms. Perhaps the best way to preserve the cultural meaning of Convention Hall is to promote parades on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, more inclusive events at the Pennsylvania Convention Center, concerts at Penn’s Landing, and other communal gatherings in Philadelphia’s public spaces. Writing histories, producing documentation, recording interviews, mounting exhibits, and other forms of public history provide other means of interpreting historic institutions and spaces in the public domain.

Public art, however, has been underused by preservationists. On this note, I propose a collaborative installation that would satisfy the preservationist’s goal to call public attention to historic space (as well as her fondness for historic markers) with the artist’s desire to create more engaging work. Whether on the buildings themselves, on the sidewalks, on freestanding walls, on the newly cleared site, or on the scaffolding of a new structure, countless individual signs would announce: *On this spot in 1954, Vanessa D’Angelo graduated high school. On this spot in 1936, Franklin Roosevelt captured the Democratic nomination for President. On this spot in 1975, Ted Greenbaum watched the circus.*

Notes: Conclusion

¹ Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 30-34; Abigail A. Van Slyck, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture, 1890-1920* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995), xx.

²Ibid.

³ For examples, see "The Cleveland Public Hall," *American City* 24, no. 1 (Jan. 1921): 22-23; "Opening of Portsmouth's Combined Market and Auditorium Building," *American City* 32, no. 2 (Feb. 1925): 201; W.P. Hunter, "Roanoke's New Market and Auditorium," *American City* 28, no. 3 (Mar. 1923): 263; Frank C. Russell, "Sacramento's Memorial Auditorium," *American City* 36, no. 7 (Jul. 1927): 88-89; Lawrence Hall Fowler, "Baltimore's War Memorial and its Setting," *American City* 32 no. 2 (Aug. 1925). Other related building types reported in the pages of *American City* included municipal opera houses, auditorium-armories, exposition buildings, and municipal concert halls. See also "Municipal Auditoriums Increasingly Popular," *American City* 52, no. 10 (October 1937): 75.

⁴ Magazines like *Pencil Points*, *Architectural Forum*, *Architectural Record*, and *American Concrete* rarely published public auditoriums.

⁵ Regrettably, Will Rogers never had the opportunity to cover a political convention held in Philadelphia. He did, however, "report" Chicago's 1920 Republican Convention from the Philadelphia home of machine politician Boies Penrose. The dateline read "SOMEWHERE IN PHILADELPHIA." Rogers figured that all the decisions would be made by Senator Penrose: "The Republican National Convention is being held right here in Philadelphia. Senator Penrose called himself to order this morning." See "Will Rogers Says," 8 Jun. 1924, News Enterprise Association as reprinted in *Convention Articles of Will Rogers*, ed. Joseph A. Stout, Jr. (Stillwater, OK: Oklahoma State Univ. Press, 1976), 12.

⁶ Oliver Bowles, *The Stone Industry* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1934); Arthur Loomis Harmon, "Auditoriums" in *Building Types*, vol. III of *Forms and Functions of Twentieth-Century Architecture*, ed. Talbot Hamlin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 478-520; James Marston Fitch, *American Building: The Forces That Shape It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1947), 170-78.

⁷ Van Slyck, *Free to All*, xxi.

⁸ See David Brownlee, *Building the City Beautiful: The Benjamin Franklin Parkway and The Philadelphia Museum of Art* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1989), 71-113; Hayden, *Power of Place*, 33.

⁹ See R. Craig Sautter and Edward M. Burke, *Inside the Wigwam: Chicago Presidential Conventions, 1860-1996* (Chicago: Wild Onion Books, 1996).

¹⁰ Ruth H. Hunter, *The Trade and Convention Center of Philadelphia: Its Birth and Renaissance* (Philadelphia: City of Philadelphia, 1962), 63-96; *The Philadelphia Civic Center, 1962-1972: A Decade of Progress* (Philadelphia: City of Philadelphia, 1971), 7-9; Board of Trade and Conventions, *Annual Reports* (1953-69).

¹¹ Alexander Garvin, *The American City: What Works, What Doesn't* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996), 81-91.

¹² William H. Whyte, *City: Rediscovering the Center* (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), 206-221.

¹³ Garvin, *The American City*, 91.

¹⁴ David Baldinger et al., *Convention Center Site Study* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia City Planning Commission, 1982); Jim Quinn, "Unconventional Wisdom," *Philadelphia* 85, no. 1 (Jan. 1994): 72-74, 159; Pennsylvania Convention Center Authority, Publicity Packet, [1996?].

¹⁵ Michael McGettigan, "Field of Schemes," *Welcomat*, 31 Jul. 1994.

¹⁶ "Court Satisfies Both Sides," *Evening Bulletin*, 2 February 1916.

¹⁷ Scott Lanman, "Diorka to overhaul recreation," *Daily Pennsylvanian*, 13 Sept. 1996.

Interview with Sharon Pinkenson, Philadelphia Film Commission, 29 April 1997.

¹⁸ David L. Cohen as quoted by McGettigan in "Field of Schemes," *Welcomat*.

¹⁹ Philadelphia Historical Commission (hereafter PHC), "Civic Center Museum" Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, 1980, and Clio Group, Inc. "Civic Center Museum," Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form, 1981 (revised 1983), both in "Civic Center Boulevard—Civic Center Museum" file, PHC; Clio Group, Inc., "Civic Center Auditorium" [Convention Hall], 1981, "Civic Center Boulevard—Philadelphia Civic Center" file, PHC.

²⁰ Convention Hall oversatisfies criteria A (event) and B (person). If the municipal convention hall is recognized as a legitimate building type, Philadelphia's property should satisfy criterion C that it "embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction." Finally, an archaeological survey of the Civic Center site concluded that the buildings' deep basements probably precluded the survival of any significant archaeological resources. See "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation," *National Register Bulletin* 15 (1991), 12-24 and John L. Cotter et al., *The Buried Past: An Archaeological History of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 290-94.

²¹ Lynda H. Schneekloth, Marcia F. Feuerstein, and Barbara A. Campagna, *Changing Places: ReMaking Institutional Buildings* (Fredonia, NY: White Pine Press, 1992), 202.

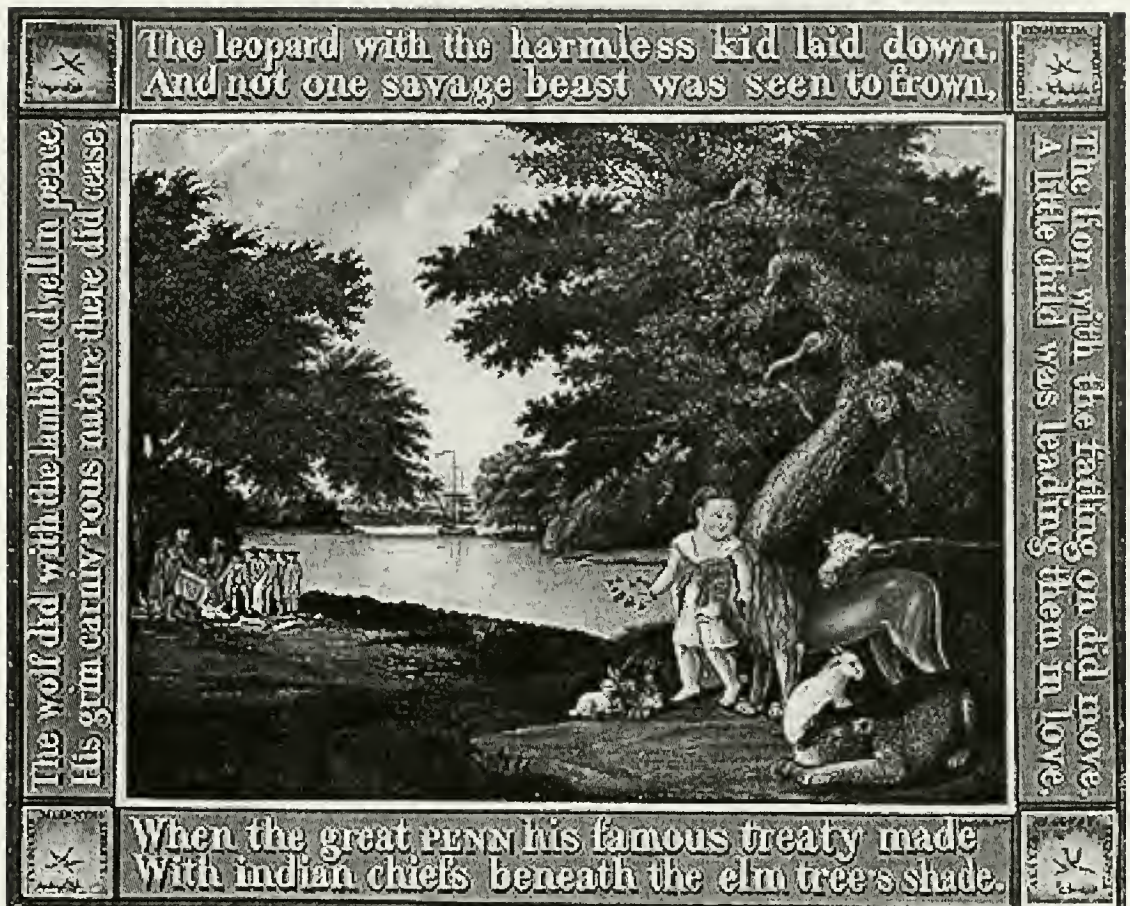


fig. 1 Edward Hicks, *Peaceable Kingdom With Rhymed Borders*, 1826.
 From Alice Ford, *Edward Hicks: His Life and Art* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), 100.



fig. 2 The Chinese Museum, 1853.
 From "The Gardeners' Exhibition," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 4 June 1853.

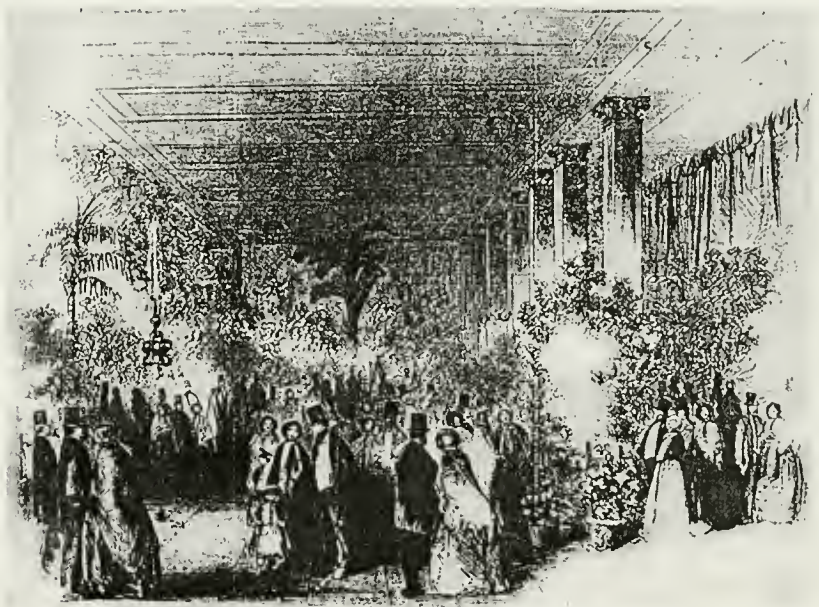


fig. 3 Gardeners' Exhibition at the Chinese Museum 1853.
 Same source as above.

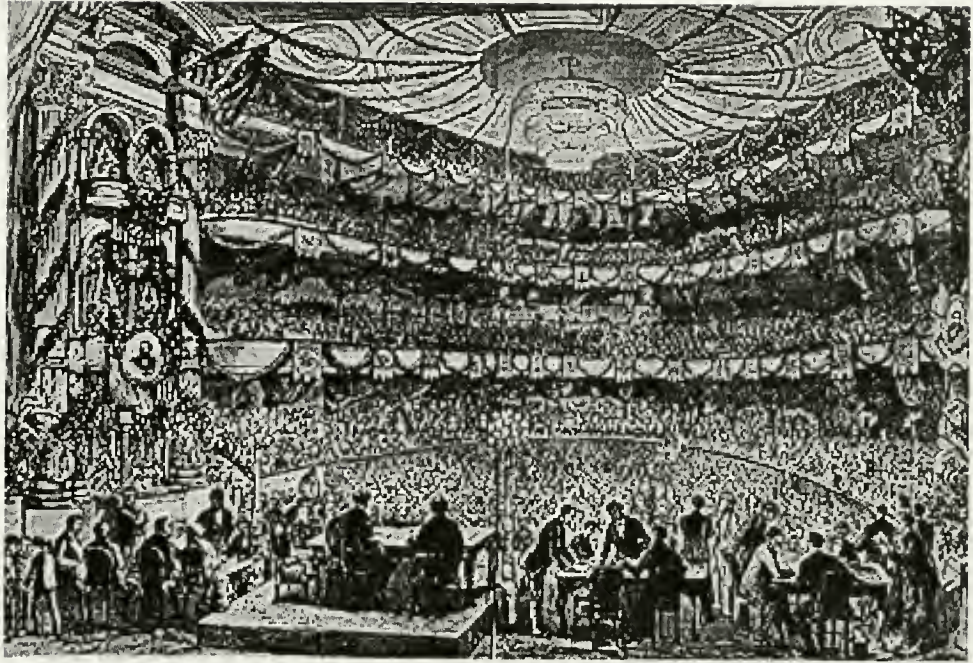


fig. 4 Republican National Convention, Academy of Music, 1872.
From John Francis Marion, *Within These Walls: A History of the Academy of Music in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Academy of Music, 1984), 83.



fig. 5 Machinery Exhibition and Sales Room, Philadelphia Bourse, ca. 1900.
From "The Machinery Exhibition and Sales Room of the Philadelphia Bourse,"
[1900?], Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



fig. 6 Commercial Museum, 233 S. 4th Street, ca. 1899.
From *Bulletin of the National Export Exposition* I, no. 29 (7 Dec. 1899), 1.

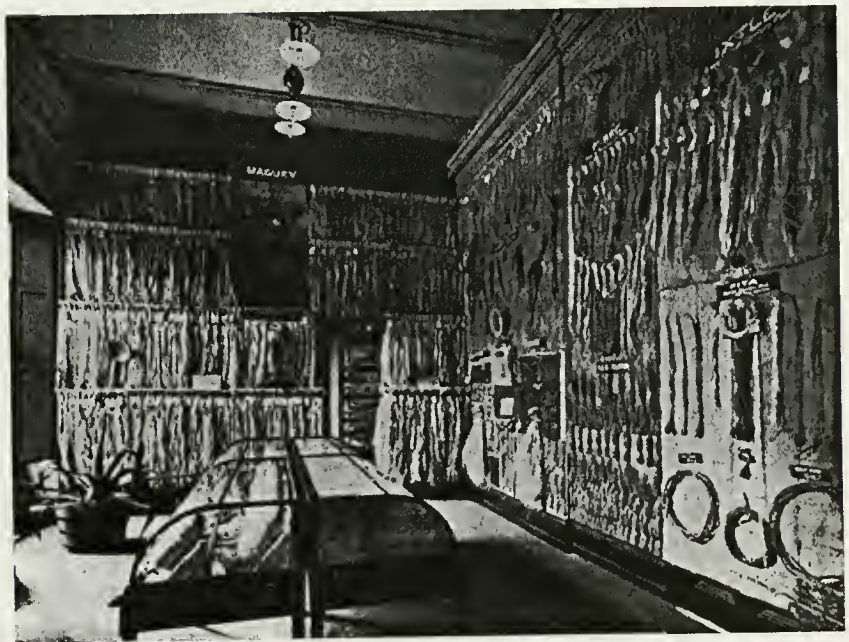


fig. 7 Commercial Museum: Exhibit of fibers from Mexico, ca. 1899.
From Ruth H. Hunter, *The Trade and Convention Center of Philadelphia: Its Birth and Renaissance* (Philadelphia: City of Philadelphia, 1962), 10.

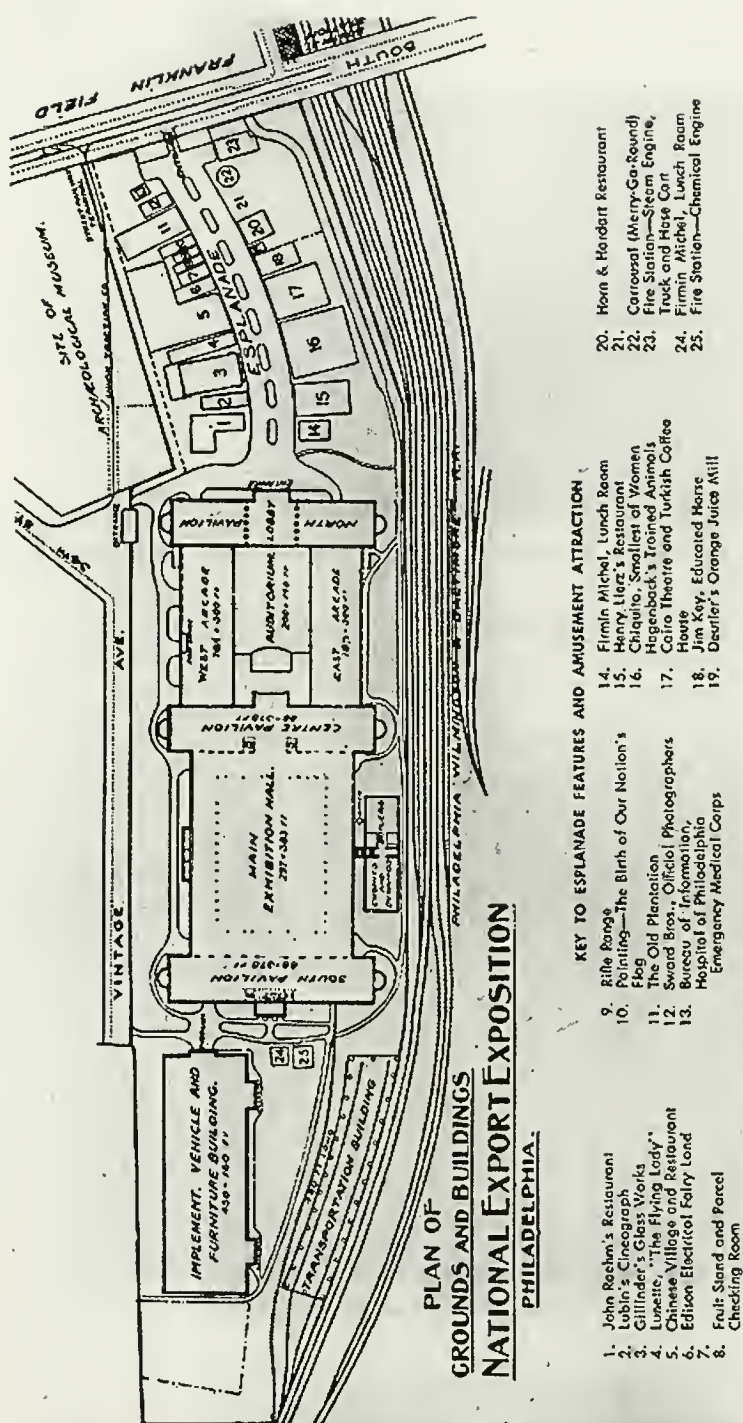


fig. 8 Plan of Grounds and Buildings, National Export Exposition, Philadelphia, 1899.
From Ruth H. Hunter, *The Trade and Convention Center of Philadelphia: Its Birth and Renaissance* (Philadelphia: City of Philadelphia, 1962), 15.

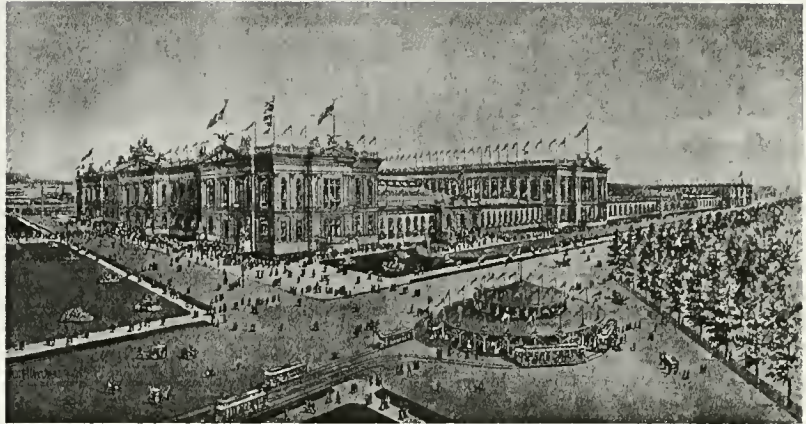


fig. 9 Wilson Brothers and Hewitt Brothers, Main Building, National Export Exposition, 1899. Delineator unknown.
From *Bulletin of the National Export Exposition* I, no. 3 (1 Jun. 1899), 4.



fig. 10 Republican National Convention, National Export Exposition Auditorium, 1900.
From *The Life of William McKinley* (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1901), 81.



fig. 11 Wilson Brothers, Hewitt Brothers, and Brockie and Hastings, North Building,
Commercial Museum, ca. 1907.
From Philadelphia Museums, *Annual Report* (1907), 15.



fig. 12 Reading Room and Library, Commercial Museum, ca. 1907.
From Philadelphia Museums, *Annual Report* (1907), 12.

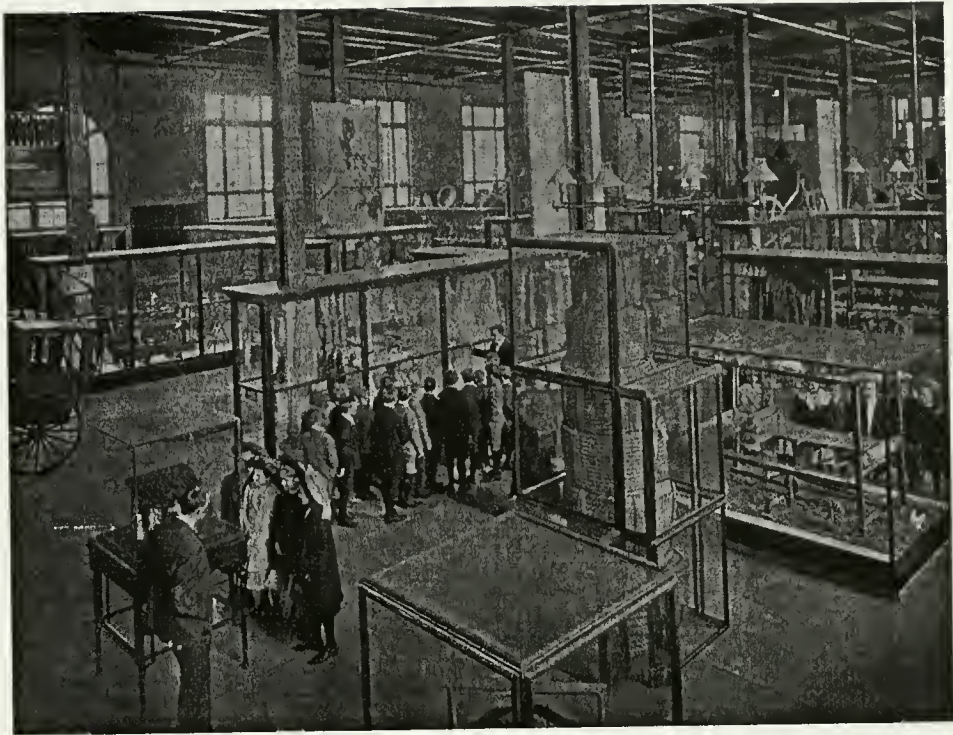


fig. 13 Students at a gallery lecture, Commercial Museum, ca. 1908.
Philadelphia Museums, *Annual Report* (1908), 7.

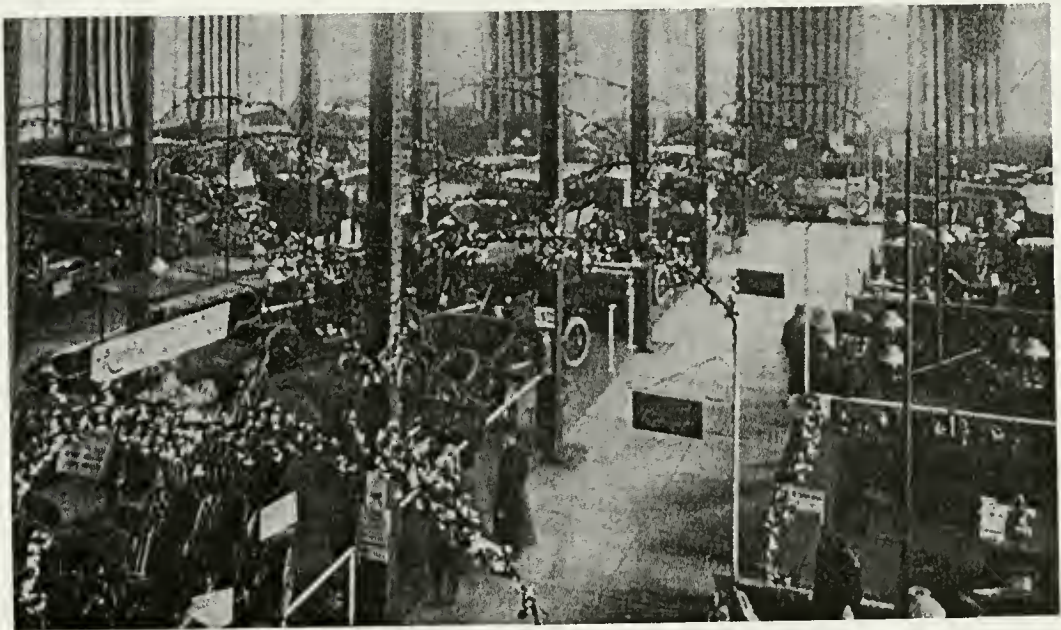


fig. 14 Automobile Show in Center Building, Commercial Museum, 1906.
From Ruth H. Hunter, *The Trade and Convention Center of Philadelphia: Its Birth and Renaissance* (Philadelphia: City of Philadelphia, 1962), 47.

fig. 15 SITES CONSIDERED FOR A MUNICIPAL CONVENTION HALL
(AND/OR VICTORY HALL)*, PHILADELPHIA

Dates considered	Current mayor	Site
ca. 1909	Reyburn	Broad, Callowhill, Race, and Wood Sts.
pre-1910		In Fairmount Park at Lemon Hill
pre-1910		In Fairmount Park at Sedgley
1910-12, 1915, 1924, 1926	Reyburn, Blankenburg, Kendrick	Snyder's Woods in Fairmount Park at 33rd St. above Girard Ave.
1910	Reyburn	Bridging the Schuylkill River between Market and Chestnut Sts.
1910, 1924	Reyburn, Kendrick	21st, 22nd, Market, and Arch Sts. over the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks
ca. 1911	Reyburn	Broad and Wallace Sts.
1915	Blankenburg	Northeast corner of Broad and Allegheny Sts.
1915	Blankenburg	On the Schuylkill River between Market, 24th, and Chestnut Sts.
1915	Blankenburg	On the north side of Fairmount Pkwy between 24th, 25th, and Green Sts.
1916-17	Smith	On Fairmount Pkwy between 21st, 22nd, Callowhill, and Hamilton Sts.
1917	Smith	North side of Chestnut, between 4th and 5th Sts.
1917	Smith	On the foundations of the Broad St. Station at Market, 15th, Filbert, and 17th Sts.
1920	Moore	On Fairmount Pkwy fronting on Race St. between 18th and 19th Sts.
ca. 1920-23	Moore	On Fairmount Pkwy between 16th, 17th, Race, and Cherry Sts.
1922, 1925-26	Moore, Kendrick	On the north side of Fairmount Pkwy between 16th and 17th Sts.; same site but for Victory Hall; same site as combined Victory Hall/Convention Hall

(continues)

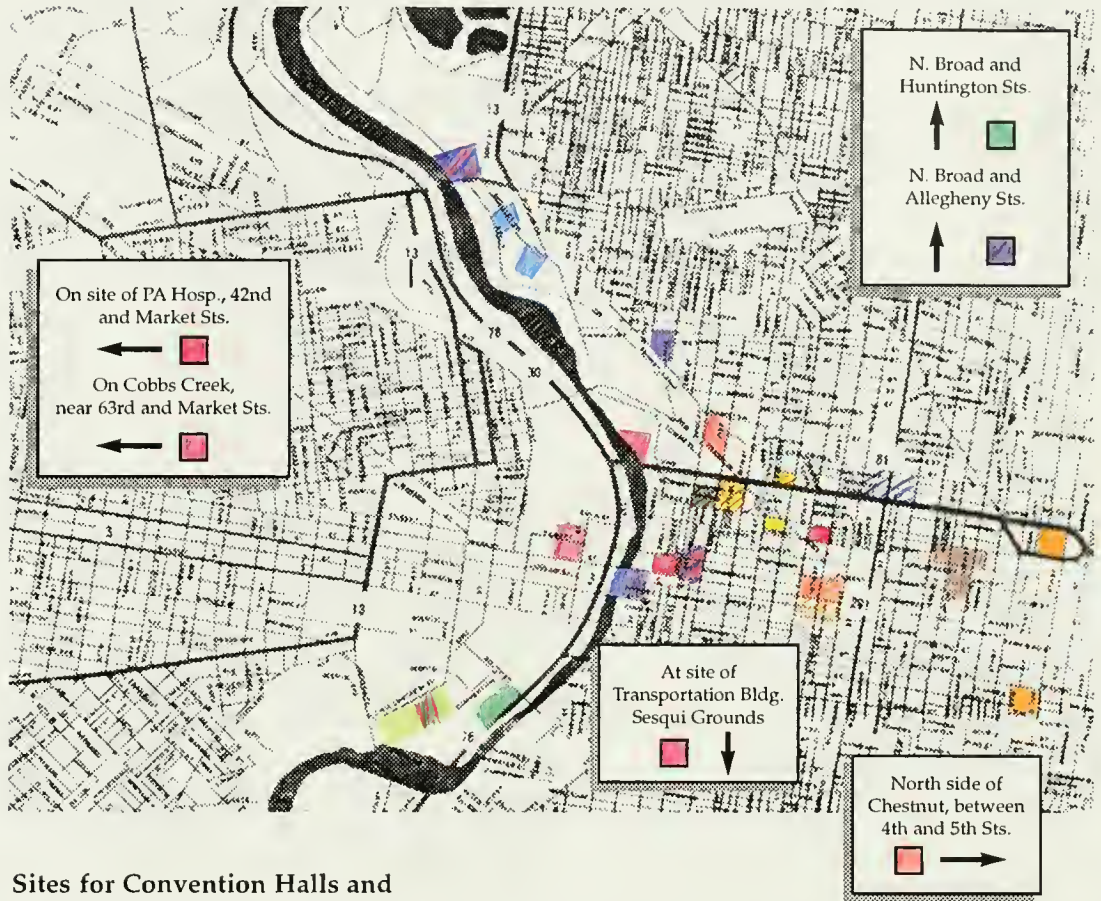
*Sites considered for a Victory Hall are indicated.

fig. 15 SITES CONSIDERED FOR A MUNICIPAL CONVENTION HALL
(AND/OR VICTORY HALL)*, PHILADELPHIA (*continued*)

Dates considered	Current mayor	Site
1922-25	Moore, Kendrick	On Fairmount Pkwy between 20th, Race, 21st, and Winter Sts.
pre-1924		Washington Square
pre-1924		Franklin Square
pre-1924		Corner of 16th and Market Sts.
ca. 1924	Kendrick	Facing a proposed River Boulevard on the north side of Market St. at 30th St.
1924	Kendrick	On Cobbs Creek near corner of 63rd and Market Sts.
1924	Kendrick	On the east bank of the Schuylkill between Callowhill and 25th Sts. (in addition to a Victory Memorial Hall at 19th and Vine Sts.)
1924, 1927-29	Kendrick, Mackey	On the grounds of the Commercial Museum, 34th St. below Pine St.
1926	Kendrick	North side of Market St. between 22nd and 23rd Sts.
1926	Kendrick	On the site of the Pennsylvania Hospital for Mental and Nervous Diseases, Market and 42nd Sts.
1926, 1928	Kendrick, Mackey	On Fairmount Pkwy between Vine, 21st, Race, and 22nd Sts.
1927	Kendrick	In or on site of Transportation Building from Sesqui-Centennial Exposition, S. Broad St. below Packer Ave.
1928	Mackey	N. Broad and Huntingdon Sts. at Phillies Park
1928	Mackey	River Field: on line of W. River Drive (below South St.)

*Sites considered for a Victory Hall are indicated.



fig. 16 SITES CONSIDERED FOR A MUNICIPAL CONVENTION HALL AND/OR VICTORY HALL, PHILADELPHIA, pre-1909-1929



Sites for Convention Halls and Victory Halls were considered during the following mayoral terms:

Reyburn		Philadelphia Civic Center: (current)	
Blankenburg			
Smith			
Moore		Pennsylvania Convention Center:	
Kendrick			
Mackey			

Other sites were considered:

pre-1910	
pre-1924	

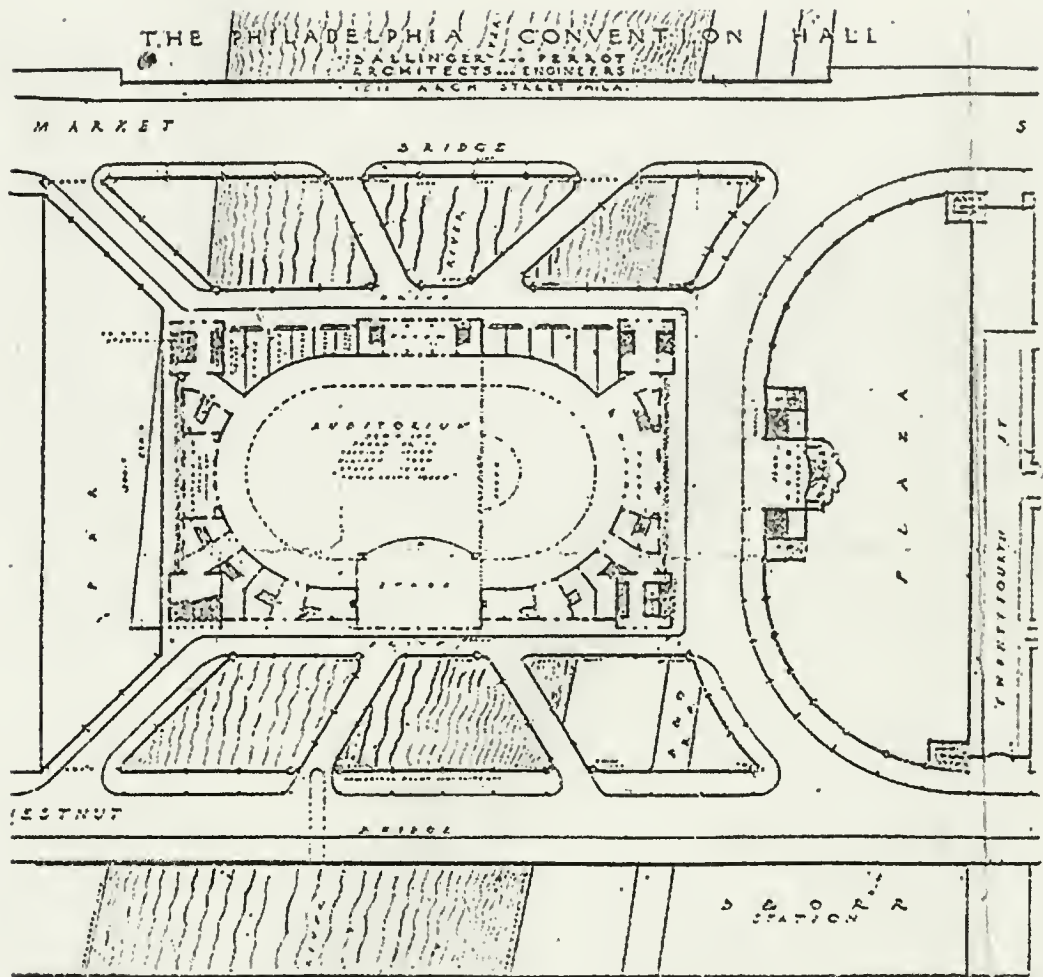


fig. 17 Ballinger and Perrot, Convention Hall. First floor plan, 1910.
 From "Complete Plans For Great Hall To Bridge River; To Seat 18,400," *North American*, 25 Jun.
 1910.



fig. 19 John Windrim, Grand Assembly Center. Bird's-eye perspective, 1911.
From "Comprehensive Plans Number," *Philadelphia III*, no. 4 (Mar. 1911): 38.



fig. 20 Carl Berger, Temporary Convention Hall, 1912. Photograph, 1914.
Photograph Collection, Philadelphia City Archives.

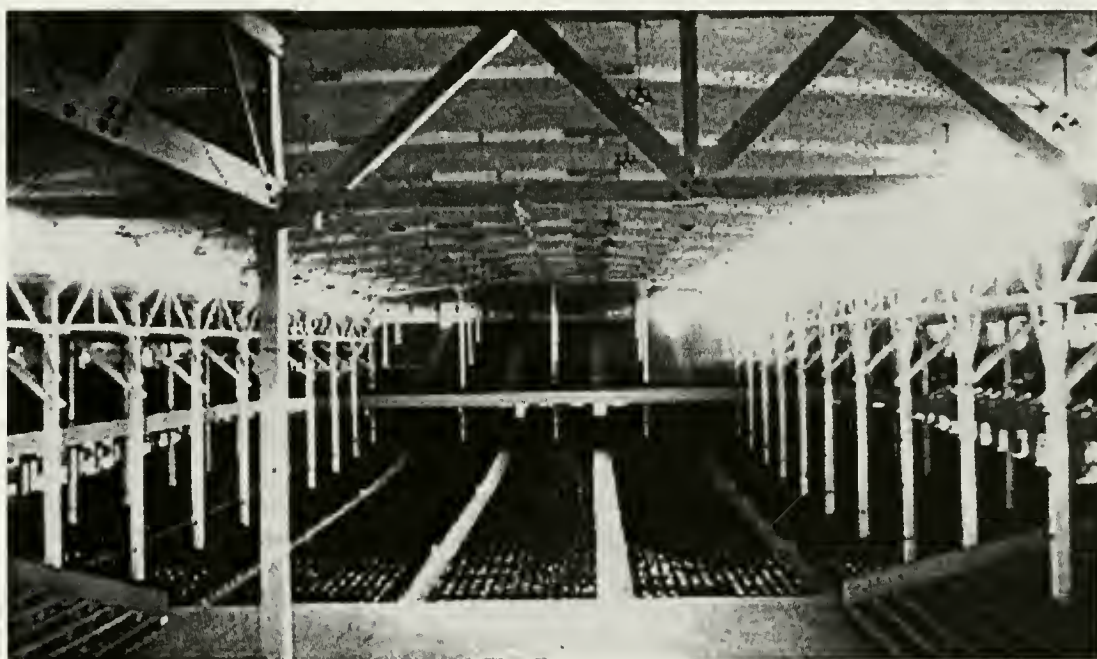


fig. 21 Temporary Convention Hall interior, 1912.
Photograph Collection, Philadelphia City Archives.



fig. 22 John Windrim, Convention Hall. Perspective, 1916.
 From City Parks Association of Philadelphia, *Annual Report* (28), 1916, 14.

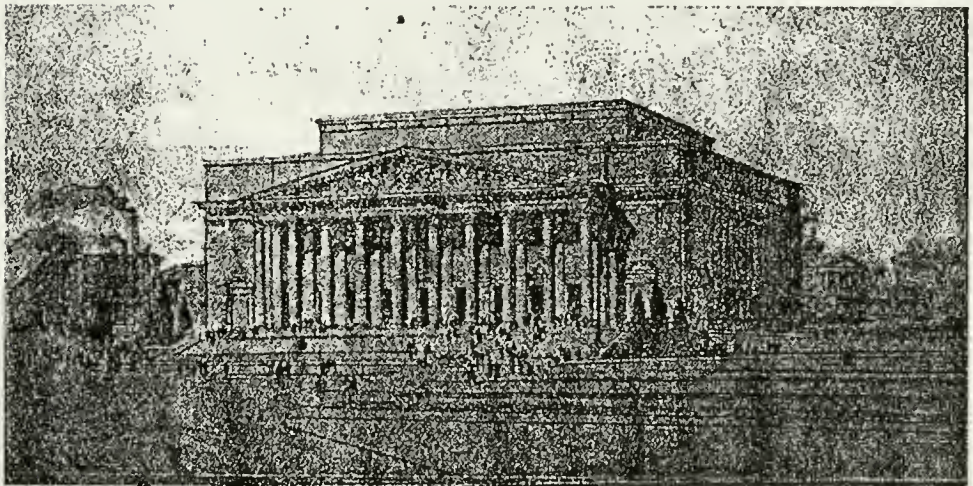


fig. 23 John Windrim, Convention Hall. Perspective, 1917.
 From Director's Office of the Department of Public Works, "The New Municipal Auditorium" [press release], 11 Mar. 1917, Campbell Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

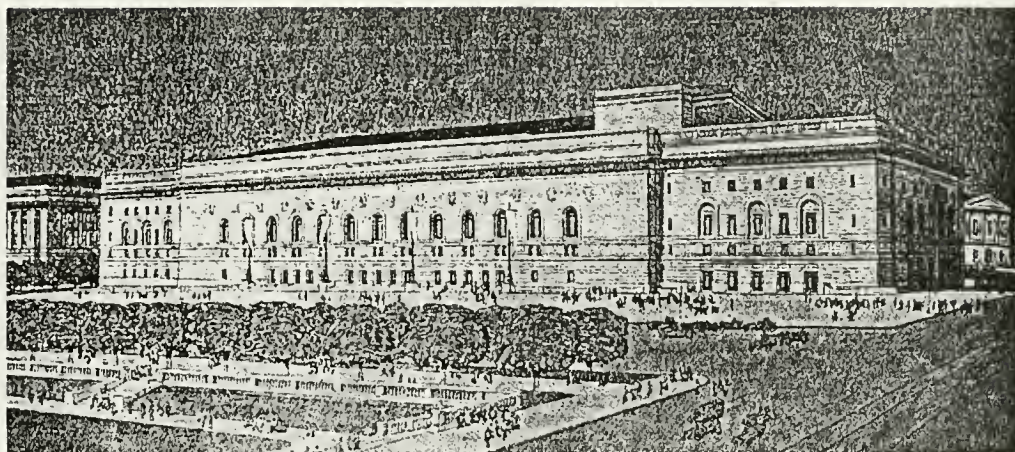


fig. 24 J. Harold McDowell, Public Auditorium (1922) and Herman Kregelius, Music Hall (1928). Perspective, 1922.

The proposed Music Hall, which appears directly to the south (right) of the Auditorium, was erected in 1928. It covers the original south elevation of the Public Auditorium (see fig. 31).

From "Official Souvenir, Cleveland Public Auditorium," 1922, mounted in vol. XXIV, Warren P. Laird Collection, Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania.



"\$2300 A SEAT!"

fig. 25 DeMar, "\$2300 A SEAT!" 1924.

From "Veterans Ready To Attack Plan of Victory Hall," *Public Ledger*, 25 Nov. 1924.

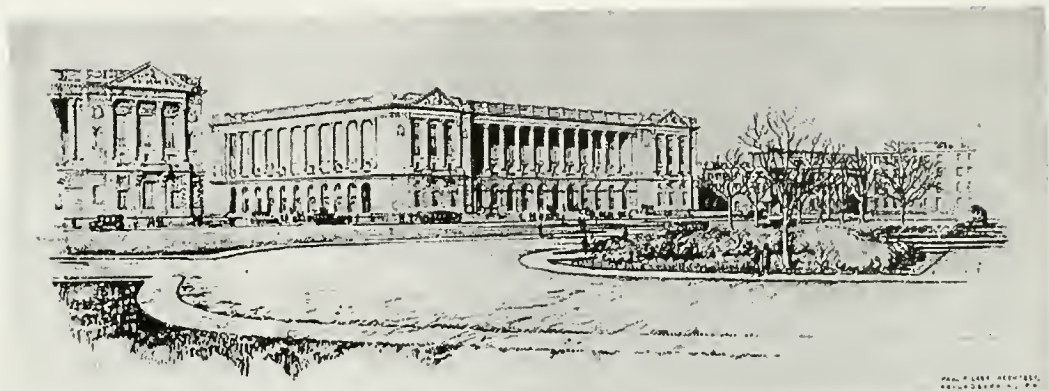


fig. 26 Paul Cret, Victory Hall. Perspective, 1925.
185.3, Cret Collection, Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania.

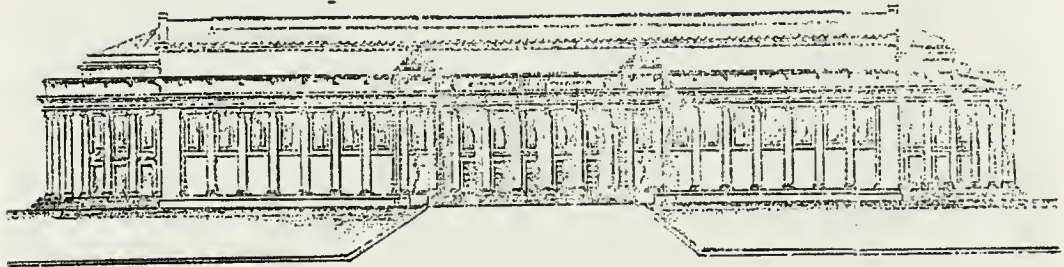


fig. 27 John Molitor, Convention Hall. Elevation, 1926.
From "Fine Features Shown In Plan For Great Hall," no cite, 11 Jul. 1926,
Urban Archives, Temple University.

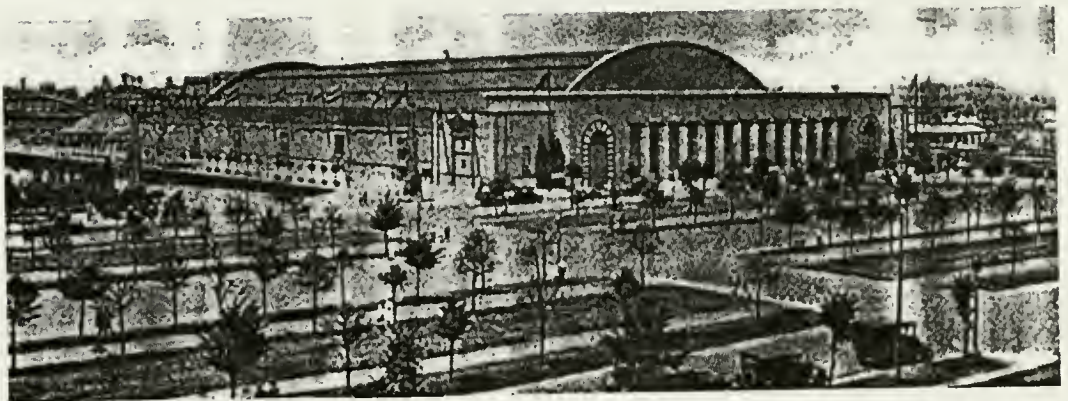


fig. 28 Auditorium Building, Sesqui-Centennial Grounds, 1926.
From E.L. Austin and Odell Hauser, *The Sesqui-Centennial Exposition*
(New York: Arno Press, 1976), 213.



fig. 29 Cover of *The Philadelphia Municipal Auditorium*
(Philadelphia: City of Philadelphia, 1931).
This souvenir booklet was distributed at the September 1931 opening.

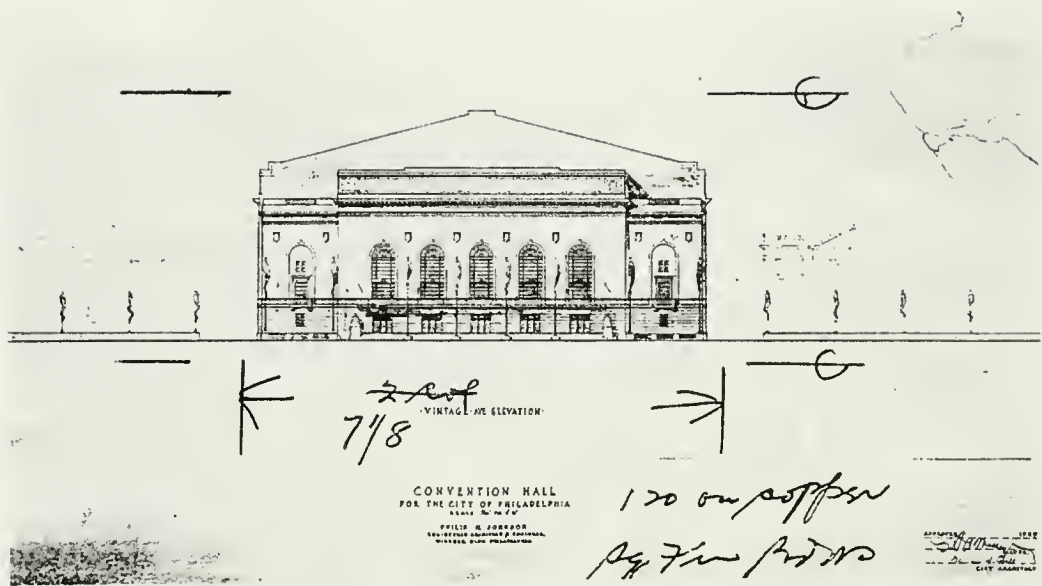


fig. 30 Philip H. Johnson, Municipal Auditorium, 1929-31. West elevation, 1929. From Convention Hall file, Photograph Collection, Urban Archives, Temple University.

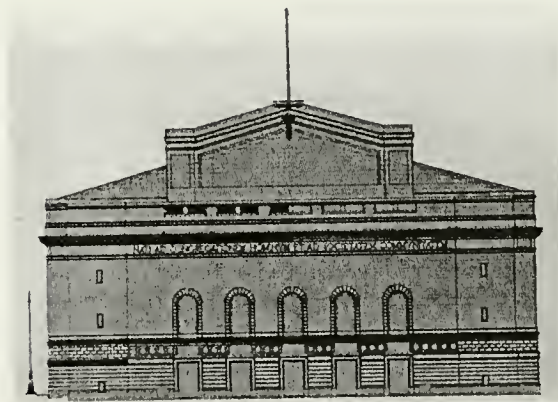


fig. 31 J. Harold MacDowell, Public Auditorium, 1922. Elevation, ca. 1917. From Holly M. Rarick, *Progressive Vision: The Planning of Downtown Cleveland, 1903-1930* Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1986), 49.

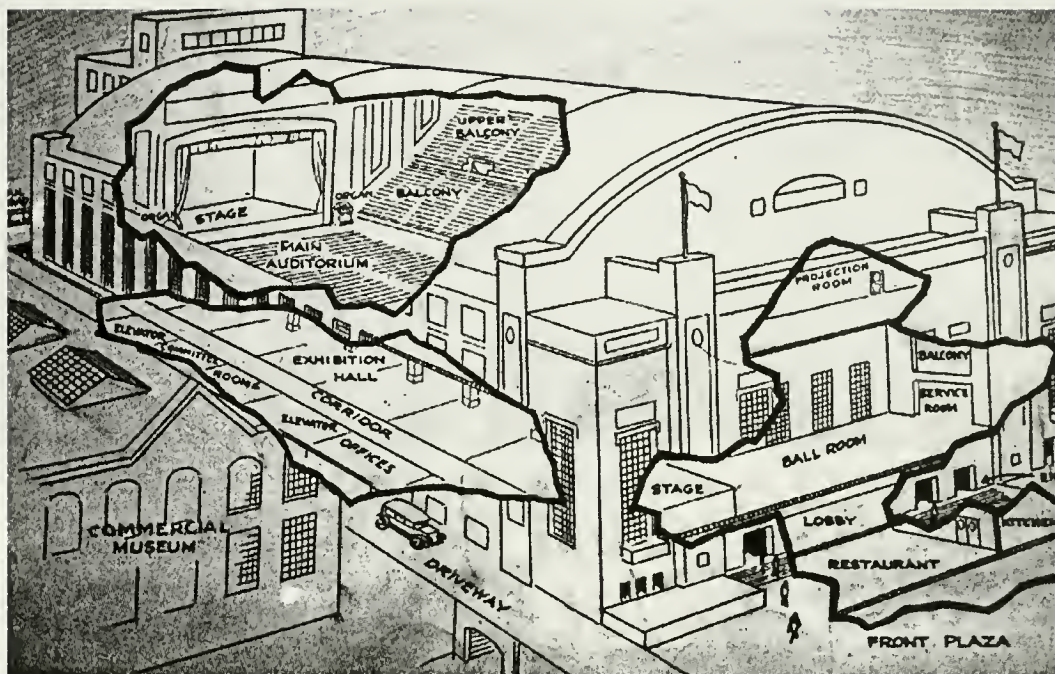


fig. 32 Municipal Auditorium. Cut-away perspective, 1931.
From "How New Auditorium Housed Its First Convention," *Public Ledger*, Jun. 1931.

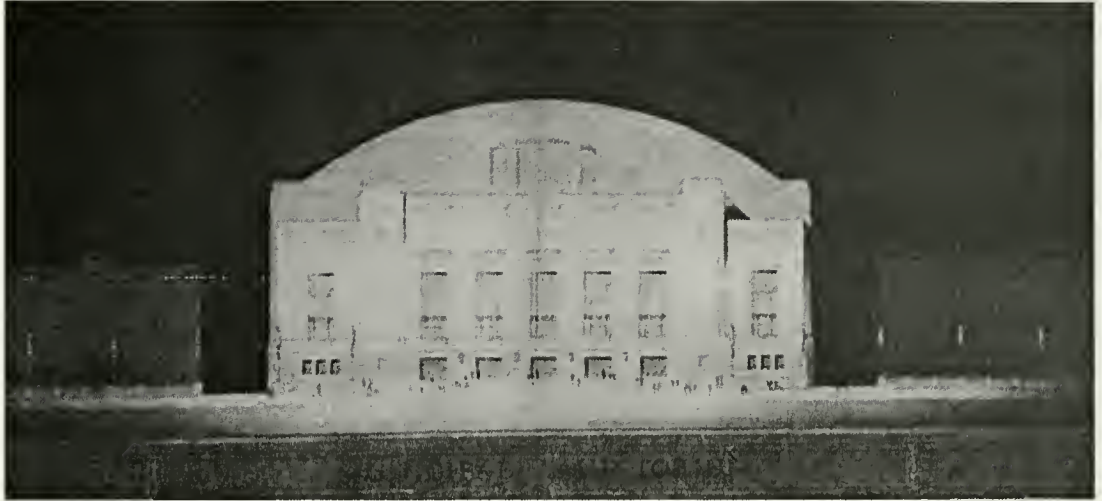


fig. 33 Philip H. Johnson, Municipal Auditorium, 1929-31. West elevation, 1929.
From file #2158, Art Jury, Philadelphia City Archives.



fig. 34 Lockwood, Greene, & Co., Atlantic City Convention Hall, 1926-27.
Photograph, 1929.
From Samuel L. Ware and D.D. Eames, "Construction and Equipment of the Atlantic City
Convention Hall," *Architectural Forum* 51, no. 3 (August 1929): 237.



fig. 35 Philip H. Johnson, Municipal Auditorium, 1929-31. North elevation, 1929.
From file #2158, Art Jury, Philadelphia City Archives.

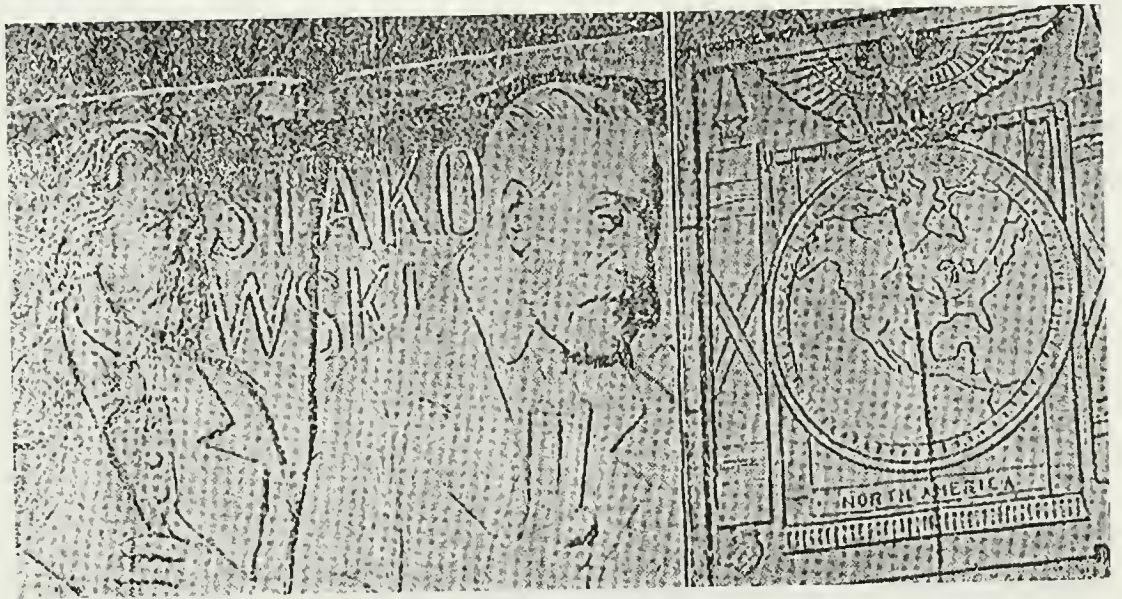


fig. 36 Frieze and panel details, Municipal Auditorium, 1931.
From "To Fix Map Errors In Convention Hall," *Evening Bulletin*, 2 March 1931.



fig. 37 American Medical Association convention in auditorium of Municipal Auditorium, 1931.
From *The Philadelphia Municipal Auditorium* (Philadelphia: City of Philadelphia, 1931).



fig. 38 U.S. Navy Band concert at Municipal Auditorium (Mayor Mackey at front right), 1931.
From *The Philadelphia Municipal Auditorium* (Philadelphia: City of Philadelphia, 1931).



fig. 39 Electrical Trade Show at Municipal Auditorium, 1933.
From Convention Hall file, Print and Picture Department, Free Library of Philadelphia.



fig. 40 Democratic National Convention at Municipal Auditorium, 1936.
From Conventions flat file, Print and Picture Department, Free Library of Philadelphia.

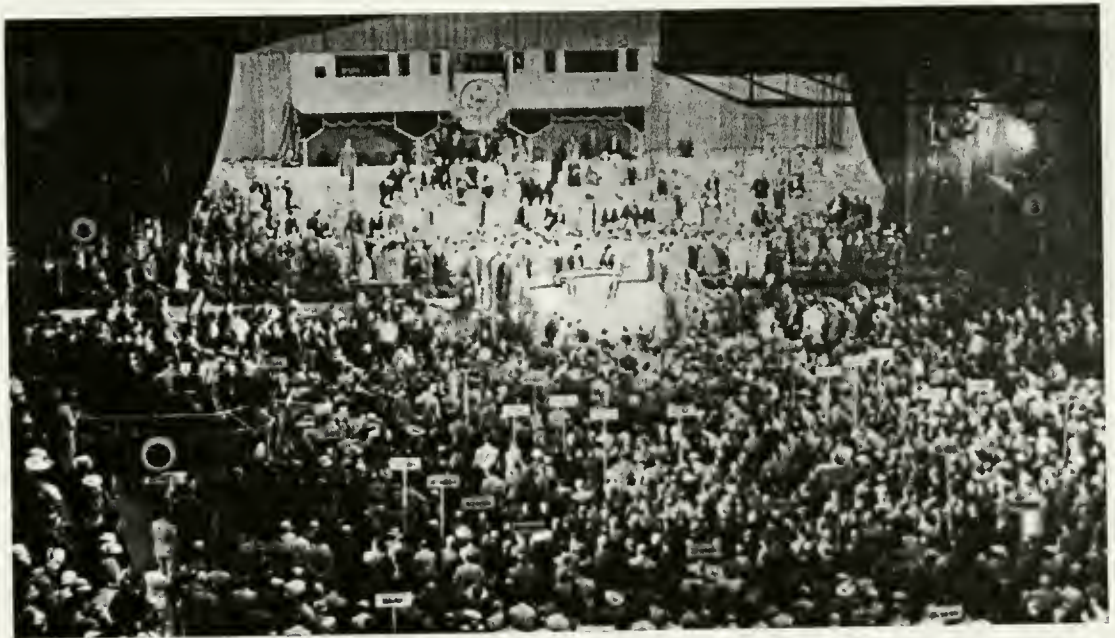


fig. 41 Democratic National Convention at Municipal Auditorium (interior), 1936.
From Conventions flat file, Print and Picture Department, Free Library of Philadelphia.

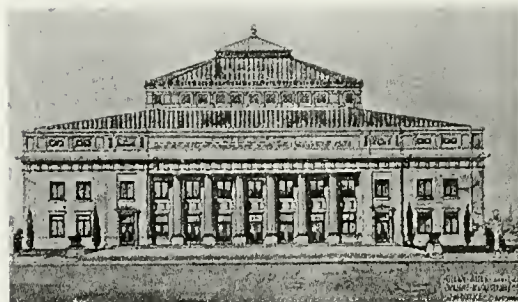
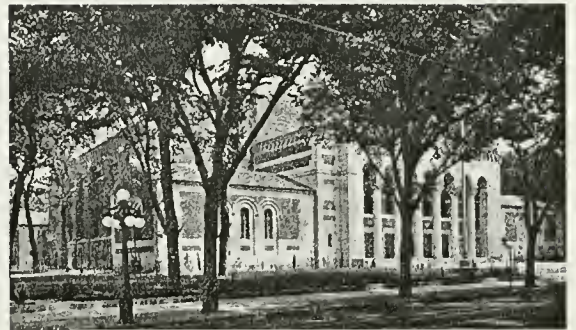
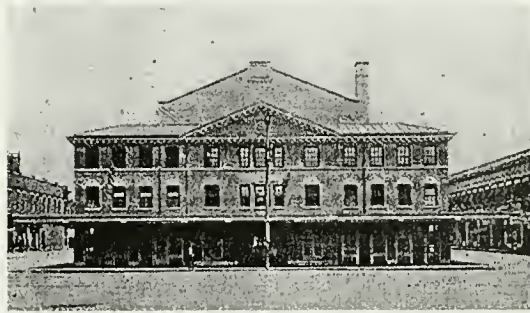
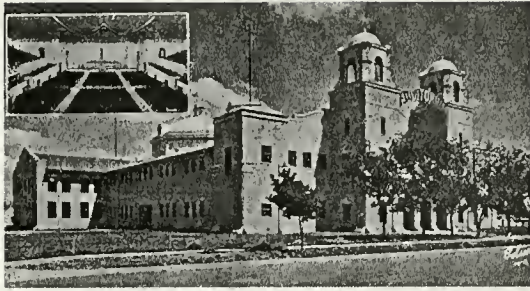
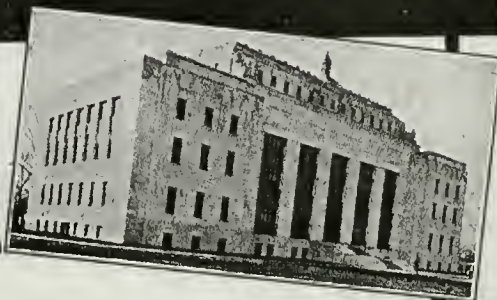


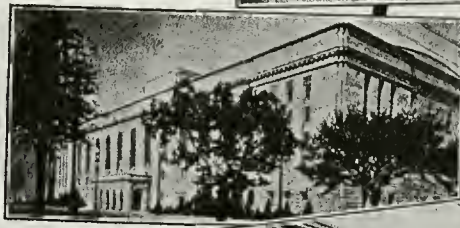
fig. 42 (Counterclockwise from left top corner) Amarillo's Memorial City Auditorium (1922-23), Kansas City's Municipal Auditorium (1933-34), Sacramento's Memorial Auditorium (1926-27), Tampa's Municipal Auditorium (1926), Stockton's Memorial Civic Auditorium (1924-25), Roanoke's Market and Auditorium (1921-22)
Images from *The American City and Architectural Forum* (see Bibliography)

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fig. 43 National Tube Company, "Preferred For Public Buildings" (advertisement).
From *Architectural Record* 75, no. 2 (Feb. 1934): 23.
Note Convention Hall in lower left hand corner.



fig. 44 Philadelphia Civic Center, 1997. Photograph by S. Zurier.
 Pennsylvania Hall in foreground and Convention Hall in background.

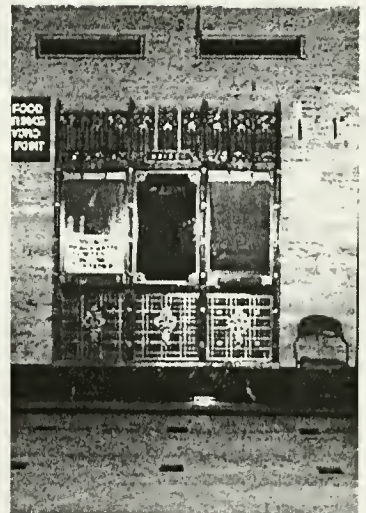


fig. 45 Convention Hall lobby, 1931 and 1996.
 From *The Philadelphia Municipal Auditorium* (Philadelphia: City of Philadelphia, 1931) (left)
 and photograph by S. Zurier (right).

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- Academy of Music, 4-5, 69
- Art Jury, 50-51, 56-57, 77-78, 80-81
- Ballinger and Perrot, 38-39
- Berger, Carl P., 44-45, 75, 98
- Blankenburg, Mayor Rudolph, 43-48
- Centennial Exposition, 1, 11, 14, 20
- Chamber of Commerce of Greater Philadelphia, 2, 35, 39, 51, 58-59, 67-70, 73-75, 78
- Chinese Museum, 4-5
- City Beautiful movement, 7, 11, 32, 36, 67, 99
- City planning, 11, 34-37, 42, 99
- Civic centers, 32, 37, 41, 72,
- Cleveland Public Auditorium, 6, 53, 56, 72, 75, 95
- Commercial Museum, 9, 12-29, 37, 46, 67, 83-86, 93, 98-101
 - and Convention Hall, 67, 83-84
 - as stand-in convention hall, 51, 70, 71
 - as public institution, 18, 22, 25, 26
 - collections, 16, 23, 27
 - exhibits and public programs, 27-28, 46, 83
 - possibly on Parkway, 37
 - rentals, 27-28, 46, 83
 - S. 4th Street location, 15
 - school programs, 24-25, 84
 - services, 16-17, 24-25, 28, 81, 83
 - West Philadelphia buildings, 19-23, 27, 84
 - West Philadelphia site, 18, 26-27
- Commercial museums, 14
- Convention Hall, Philadelphia (see Philadelphia Convention Hall)
- Convention halls
 - building type, 5-9, 93-98
- Conventions
 - 17th century, 1, 3
 - 18th century, 1, 3
 - 19th century, 1
 - definition, 2, 27-28
 - national, 4, 6, 22, 60, 81-82
 - political, 4-5, 22, 67-27, 53, 98
- Cret, Paul P., 55-56, 80
- Depression, 7, 67, 85
- Fairmount Park, 13, 36, 38-39, 58
- Fairmount Parkway, 44, 32-33, 36-37, 72, 48-51, 56, 58
- Fairs
 - architecture, 8, 11, 12, 14, 40-41, 98
 - county, 4
 - international, 4, 7-8, 11, 12, 14, 16, 20, 22, 57-60
 - state, 40-41
- Greenfield, Albert M., 58, 65, 67, 69-70
- Hewitt Brothers, 20
- Johnson, Philip H., 35, 66-67, 73-78
- Kendrick, Mayor W. Freeland, 55-57, 68, 74
- Mackey, Mayor Harry A., 66-68, 70, 72-75, 77, 79, 84
- McKinley, President William, 18, 22
- Molitor, John, 56
- Moore, Mayor J. Hampton, 52, 58, 85
- Municipal Auditorium, Philadelphia (see Philadelphia Convention Hall)
- Municipal auditoriums (see Convention halls)
- Municipal convention halls (see convention halls)
- National Export Exposition, 18-22, 26
- Pennsylvania Convention Center, 2, 99, 101
- Pennsylvania Museum, 14-15, 32, 41
- Philadelphia
 - Art Jury (see Art Jury)
 - As convention location, 1-2, 22, 58-59
 - City and regional planning, 34-36, 43, 82-83
 - Comprehensive Plans Committee, 37-41
 - Machine politics, 33-35, 58, 73
 - Proposals for a convention hall, Blankenburg administration, 43-48

Kendrick administration, 55-57
 Mackey administration, 55
 Moore administration, 52
 Reyburn administration, 37-43
 Smith administration, 49-52
 Proposals for a Victory Hall, 52-56
 Reform efforts, 33-34, 43-44, 51-52
 Temporary Convention Hall, 44-47
 Philadelphia Bourse, 15
 Philadelphia Civic Center, 9, 98-101
 Philadelphia Convention Hall, 7-9, 66-89, 93, 98-101
 and Commercial Museum, 67, 83-84
 Construction, 79-82
 Conventions, 81, 85, 87-89
 Design, 76-79
 Entertainment, 86-87
 Management, 83-85
 Opening, 66-67
 Public assemblies, 66-67, 85
 Rentals, 86
 Siting, 71-73, 83
 Trade shows, 87
 Philadelphia Municipal Auditorium (see Philadelphia Convention Hall)
 Philadelphia Museum of Art (see Pennsylvania Museum)
 Political conventions (see conventions)
 Progressivism, 6-7, 33-35, 67

 Reyburn, Mayor John, 26, 37-43, 93

 Saengerfest, 42-44, 52, 98
 San Francisco Civic Auditorium and Civic Center, 6, 4, 41, 72
 Sesqui-Centennial Exposition, 58-60, 68, 69, 78
 Smith, Mayor Thomas B., 46, 49-51

 Taxpayers' suits, 43, 50, 54, 97
 Temporary Convention Hall (see Philadelphia Temporary Convention Hall)
 Trade shows, 4, 6-7, 27-28

 University of Pennsylvania, 13, 16, 26-27, 68-70, 100

 Victory Halls, 52-54, 94

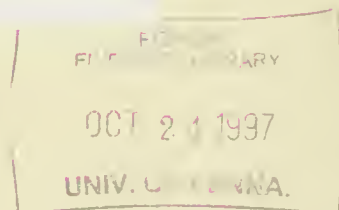
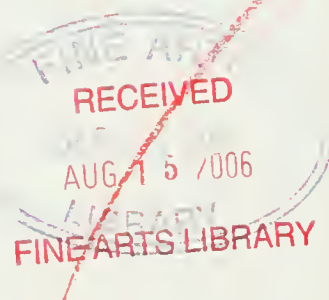
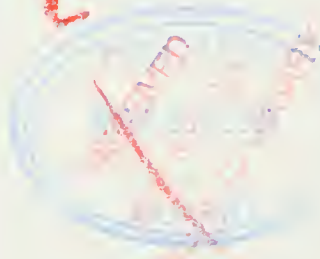
 Wilson, William P., 13, 14, 17, 21, 26, 71
 Wilson Brothers, 20
 Windrim, John, 35, 39-41, 49-51, 98
 World's Columbian Exhibition, 11, 16-22, 32

Anne & Jerome Fisher

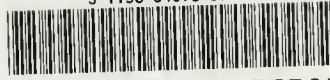
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